

Wishing everyone a joyful Christmas

CROSSKEYS



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

Pilgrims of Hope

Fr Mark Hogan looks forward to events happening around St Peter's Church in the year ahead

Pope Francis has called for 2025 to be a Jubilee Year, inviting us to become Pilgrims of Hope as we journey together in faith and love.

My hope during this forthcoming year is that we will experience God's faithfulness, and so grow to trust Him more fully as we make our pilgrim journey; that we will experience in a new way the love of God that has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit and so believe more firmly that our "hope in God and His promises does not disappoint" (c.f. Rom 5:5).

Hope is born of love, revealed to us by the "Word made flesh", Love Incarnate, Jesus Christ. He is the one who precedes us and accompanies us as we press forward, firm in faith, active in charity and steadfast in faith (c.f. 1 Thess 1:3). He is our Hope and our Salvation. Let us continue to place Him, who was born in a Bethlehem stable and wrapped in swaddling clothes, at the centre of all that we do and are this Christmas and beyond.

Signs of Hope

As part of the Papal Bull announcing the Jubilee Year, Pope Francis speaks to us of signs of hope:

"We are also called to discover hope in the signs of the times that the Lord gives us... We need to recognise the immense goodness present in our world, lest we be tempted to think ourselves overwhelmed by evil and violence. The signs of the times, which include the yearning of human hearts in need of God's saving presence, ought to become signs of hope."

Different signs that the Pope speaks of include a desire for peace in the world and an enthusiasm for life and a readiness to share it. As we recognise these in our world, we

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Thomas reaches semi-final

Parishioner Thomas Rakowicz appeared in the semi-final of the BBC Young Choristers of the Year 2024 competition (BBC1 *Songs of Praise*, Sunday 24 November.)

Ahead of singing *Ave Maria* (Bach/Gounod), he was asked by Reverend Kate Bottley who is on his team.

Thomas spoke simply and convincingly that: "*from the start, God has been there ... Soli Deo gloria ... and that really helps me do my best performance.*"

He finds singing "*invigorating: you've done something good not for yourself but for everyone listening as well.*"

"*[My Faith] brings a lot more meaning to my singing. It's not just about me, it's what the music means and who it's for that really counts.*"

Thomas, aged 14, has been a parishioner since his family moved from London 11 years ago. A couple of years after starting at The Pilgrims' School he joined one of their choirs, the Quiristers, who sing in the Winchester College Chapel.

Early on, he attended the Children's Liturgy of the Word at the 10.30 St Peter's Mass but since joining 'The Qs' Thomas has had to juggle the parish Mass he goes to with his musical commitments, so he might go to any of them, including at St Gregory's and St Stephen's.

His first singing teacher Emma Docherty saw Thomas through to becoming "Head Q". Now a music scholar at Winchester College, he also plays the oboe and the piano. He has singing lessons with James Ottaway, who prepared him for the competition.

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can discover hope for ourselves and offer it to others.

The Pope also calls us to be “tangible signs of hope for our brothers and sisters who experience hardships of any kind”. He thinks especially of the ways in which we can become signs of hope to prisoners; the sick, weak and those struggling with disabilities; healthcare workers; the young; migrants; the elderly and the local and global poor.

“Echoing the age-old message of the prophets, the Jubilee reminds us that the goods of the earth are not destined for a privileged few, but for everyone.”

2026 – St Peter’s Church Centenary – Signs of Joy

If 2025 is to be a Year of Hope, then I pray that 2026 will be a Year of Joy. Already, great plans are underway for events and occasions for us to come together joyfully as a parish family for our St Peter’s Church Centenary Celebrations (see back page). We also want to invite others to join us in these festivities, for there is a place for all in our parish.

In preparation, we will also be carrying out a number of repairs and renovations to the St Peter’s Church building. We are currently working directly with the Diocese and Historic Churches to discuss what we would like and what might be permitted. The overall objective and timeline which we are working to is that the works should all be completed by November 2025.

Subject to approvals we are hoping to begin works in early January 2025, starting with the repairs to the cracking and plasterworks around the exterior walls of the church, which we anticipate will take us through to the

end of March 2025. During this time there will be some restrictions and possible disturbances around the church, which we will do our best to keep to a minimum. Allowing for the plaster to dry we are then hoping to look at the redecoration of the walls in the same colour paint which we anticipate will be sometime in the summer of 2025.

In the interest of consuming less energy in the future and becoming a greener Church, it is also hoped that we will be converting the lights in St Peter’s to LED which should enhance the overall look and brightness.

At the same time, we will also be looking at how we can illuminate other features around the Church and the Sanctuary. Again, we are looking to replace the carpets in the Church.

There will also be other works carried out which will largely go unnoticed by many. These include remediation works to the low-level damp on some external walls; monitoring of some cracks in hidden places (namely around the bell tower).

As you can no doubt imagine, there is an extended shopping list of what we would like to be able to do to enhance the beauty of the Church, but these invariably come at a cost and will be considered on their individual merit based upon the restricted funds that are and will be available. This is another opportunity to thank all those who’ve contributed to the Closer to Christ campaign.

Hope and Joy

So, my desire is for the next two years, 2025 and 2026, to be filled with hope and joy as we continue to bring people closer to Jesus Christ and pray that we can work with Him to renew His Church.

New Lectionary introduced

A new edition of the Lectionary, the book which contains the readings which are proclaimed at Mass, came into use in England and Wales in Advent.

The new edition uses the English Standard Version (ESV) – Catholic Edition for the readings and the Abbey Psalms and Canticles for the Responsorial Psalms.

Christmas carol quiz

At the bottom of each page is a line from a Christmas carol. Can you identify which carols they are?
Answers on Page 11.

The ESV is the latest in a series of English translations which go back to the 16th century. These translations have all been based on a ‘word for word’ principle. The ESV is directly based on the Revised Standard Version and it is suggested that about six per cent of the text has been revised.

Changes were made to modernise the language and reflect the latest scholarship. The publisher Crossway emphasises ‘word-for-word’ accuracy, literary excellence, and depth of meaning. The content for the reading for each Sunday remains the same.

The new Lectionary provides for Saints who have been added to the

Universal Calendar since the last Lectionary published in 1981. There are also the readings for the National Calendars. Some of the revised liturgical rites, such as marriage, have additional readings.

Will the text be mandatory? It is normal practice in the Roman Rite that there is only a single edition of a liturgical text in use in a particular territory. So in the same way as only the third edition of the Roman Missal (2010) may be used in the celebration of Mass (in the Ordinary Form); the same will be true for the Lectionary.

The bishops of England and Wales approved the changes in 2018.

‘With angelic host proclaim, Christ is born in Bethlehem’

The musings of a church volunteer

Sue Hume explains why she likes to help around the parish grounds

I like helping. I was born like it. Simple as that.

I became a teacher through helping others – someone I was assisting in a coaching capacity saw something in me that I didn't realise was there and I am eternally grateful to that person. Now I'm retired, I find being a volunteer at St Peter's spiritually and physically rewarding; people are really grateful for, and appreciative of, whatever you do in and around church. Since Jesus came "*not to be served but to serve*", if you're doing it for church, I'm pretty sure the Lord is grateful for your service, too.

Now, take church cleaning (please, somebody, take church cleaning!). My involvement came about when a plea went out from the energetic and inspirational Pam Freeborn for helpers. Pam has worked so hard over many years to build up teams of volunteers committed to turning up to sweep, dust, vacuum and polish, leaving the church a clean and welcoming place for parishioners and visitors to enjoy. (By the way, those volunteers have been helping for many years and would love to have some fresh muscle on board if you think you could help.)

But I digress. While I'm working, whether on my own or in a group, I'm in my happy place doing something useful, not too taxing, light-hearted and often sociable – we've been known to go for a drink and a meal together! Pam always says our work is our prayer and I'm inclined to agree – I'm in church, I'm attentive, and I've time to think about my faith and how I go about thanking God for all the blessings of life.

I have my health, my husband, my family, my grandchildren, my friends and my church family. In return for all that, I have the chance to serve and that's what I prefer to be; the Lord's servant. I like to get on and do things that need doing, and if what I do makes it easier for someone to

use, or enjoy, or take refuge in, our church then my work is done.

Already enjoying volunteering inside the church led me to answer Sean Reidy's plea for help with work around the grounds of St Peter's. So here I am, wandering around on a Thursday morning dead-heading or pruning the roses, clearing leaves, but mostly prising weeds out of all sorts of places they have no business growing.

When I'm gardening, I see people arriving for Morning Prayer, Adoration or Mass, and I think I could go in there with them. Or I could keep clearing weeds and litter and make the place a pleasure for them to come to visually as well as spiritually. So I weed. And I clear. And I think.

I spend the couple of hours I'm here ruminating, which takes my mind off the work I'm doing.

I greet Peter waiting on the steps for Morning Prayer and demonstrating such great faith. The other regulars follow him in, with many having a kind word to say about my work, giving me a boost especially if it's chucking it down. Which it has been known to do!

The stream of visitors continues all the while – the art ladies going to their class in Milner Hall, the aged dog taking its even more aged owner for a walk up the drive and back again, the cheeky fast food deliverer taking a short cut through to St Peter Street on his scooter. Sue goes by on her way to work and we share a word or two, triggering memories of our time sharing 'Prayer Round the Cross', Taize style.

I admit to sometimes becoming a bit resentful; people inside hear the Word while I get to weed and I'm thinking – leave the work and follow them in.

There are times when I think I know how Martha felt! "*Don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work?*" Now there's a thought – who knows how the whole conversation actually went?



Sue Hume (right) and Pam Freeborn.

We tend to just hear the part where Jesus does his "*Martha, Martha*" speech and ticks her off "*Only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen the right thing.*" (Luke 10:41-42)

But, what if Martha asked Mary later on to fill her in on the Lord's teaching?

It might have been passed on second-hand but that's no different to how we receive the Word today, so I think it's as valid; and actually getting on with some work that needs doing is fine too I reckon. As I work I console myself that I'm both women – Martha today but Mary on Sunday when I'm proclaiming the psalm and alleluia. (Volunteers for the music ministry also most welcome by the way – I never miss a recruiting opportunity!)

Good grief, is that the time! Well, I think I can look back with pleasure at what I've achieved during my stint and thank Martha for her example; then promise Mary I'll be extra devout on Sunday morning.

And I remember who makes it all possible and thank the Lord for opening up this opportunity for me to serve. Come and join me, there's plenty to do.

If you're inspired to help in any way, contact the office at St Peter's.

'The stars in the bright sky, Looked down where He lay'

Asking myself—What am I praying for?

Parishioner **Fleur Jackson** provides an answer to the question

The idea of praying to God for things seems simple, but over the years I have encountered many obstacles that have held me back.

As a child I found praying for things easy. I was used to asking for what I wanted and needed from adults, so making requests to God seemed no different. Yet I had no clear idea of who God was and what prayer was really about.

Like many people, I had a flawed, human parents, which made understanding and accepting God as a loving and wise father challenging. In addition, having been brought up to be independent, I find asking for help quite hard.

Growing up, I became aware of the suffering and injustice in the world, I learnt to appreciate that not everything asked of God is granted. Why does God not give visible help to all who pray to Him?

Working as a doctor, I saw people's hopes and prayers fail time and again, as disease and advanced age overcame patients. I sometimes questioned whether God even existed. Was I praying into a void?

Yet despite periods of doubt, I have been blessed with many answered prayers and have felt God's presence in my life, particularly in times of personal need. Over the last few years my faith has grown, along with my relationship with God and, in particular, Jesus.

I have improved my personal prayer life and joined groups praying for others. In this role, as an intercessor, I have witnessed the power of prayer at work in our parish, but what about actual miracles?

I recently had an interesting chat with another doctor who admitted that he struggled with the idea of praying for

miracles, knowing too accurately the inevitability of the diagnoses he made and the likely outcome for each patient.

This made me take a closer look at my own praying. What did I hope for when I prayed for others? Did I have faith in God's ability to act in ways that cannot be scientifically explained?

I had visited Lourdes and seen the abandoned crutches lined up, heard of miraculous cures, but did I truly believe these cures could not somehow be explained medically? Did I really believe in the miraculous?

During the same conversation, another friend shared how normal the idea of miracles was in Italy, of how many places people publicly thank saints for miracles that have occurred.

I wondered, what was different in Italy? Are they just more likely to assign a good outcome to God's intervention, or are they actually experiencing more miracles? Can miracles exist in our culture, where scientific data is often seen as the only valid answer to questions and the miraculous is lumped together with fairy tales and magic?

I tried to break the questions down into their basic elements, by asking what am I actually doing when I pray? How does it work?

Here is a sample of what I came up with:

What is prayer? The best answer I've found is simply 'a conversation with God in whatever form that takes.' Whether through music, traditional prayers, contemplation of Scripture, walks through nature, guided meditation (for example, the rosary), Adoration, or just a chat as I go about my day. All that matters is that I raise my awareness to meet with God.

Why do I need to ask for things, if God is omniscient and already knows what I need? This, along with 'why is there suffering in the world?' is

harder to answer, but I feel it comes down to free will. God created me to be in relationship with Him, which is why I am drawn to Him. He wants me to know Him, to love Him and share His joy in all that He has created.

But He also gave me free will to accept or reject Him and therefore I can choose to know or ignore Him.

He waits constantly, like the Prodigal Son's father, for me to turn to Him, but He will sometimes let me flounder in order to remind me that I need Him, to draw me back into relationship with Him.

I think of how when Peter walked on water, keeping his eyes on the Lord, he did not sink, but when he started to let the worries of the world intrude, he sank.

How should I pray? Jesus gave us the perfect prayer model in the Our Father, including the petition 'Thy will be done'.

Whatever I pray for, I ask it to be according to the will of God. I have also learnt to pray for the best outcome, rather than for a specific outcome, trusting that God can see all roads and will know the best solution, not just for the person I am praying for, but for everyone around them too. When I leave God room to work, I find the results are better, often in unexpected ways.

Who should I pray to? Sometimes I find it hard to approach God directly, but fortunately I have a host of intercessors who are willing to help, in the saints and particularly Mary. I have been helped by many saints in the past, I see them as specialists who tend to help with specific things.

What if I can't find the words? When I feel overwhelmed or have no idea what to pray for, Mary is a great help, as well as the Holy Spirit, in interpreting my needs. Alternatively, I just sit with God and place my trust in

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'Oh tidings of comfort and joy'

Archbishop meets street pastors



One of the last events attended by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, before he announced his intention to resign was on Friday 27 October when he came to join the Winchester street pastors for an hour before they went onto the streets. He delivered a homily referring to his

friend His Holiness Pope Francis and prayed for street pastors in Winchester. They are also recruiting new school pastors for secondary and primary schools across Winchester and the district. Volunteers are required at lunchtimes, once or twice a week. There will be relevant online

training in either February/March or June/July.

To find out more about being a school pastor or supporting them in a prayer, contact Mark Hibbert-Hingston by email: Winchester@schoolpastors.org.uk or tel: 07740 288654

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Him. I realise this type of prayer should be a larger part of my prayer life, as I am definitely guilty of turning up to prayer with a list to be ticked off and forgetting the most important part – being with God and listening to Him.

Why does God answer some prayers, but not others? As a parent, I know my most common responses to requests are ‘yes,’ ‘no,’ and ‘not now, later.’ This seems true for God’s responses to everyday needs, but when it comes to miracles, is it more complicated than that?

A reading from Mark’s gospel caught my attention recently, where Jesus travelled to his hometown. (Mark 6:5) ‘He could not do any miracles there, except lay His hands on a few sick people and heal them. And He was amazed at their lack of faith.’

It recalled all the other times in the Gospels when, having performed a

miracle, Jesus told people ‘Your faith has healed you.’ And of course, the passage from Matthew (17:20-21), ‘For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, “Move from here to there,” and it will move.’

Faith is clearly important when it comes to prayer. Not just faith in the existence of God, but also faith in the scope of God’s power. In believing He can act should He choose to. But is faith, or lack of it, the only factor?

Jesus said, in Luke 4:25, ‘There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah,’... ‘yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath, in the region of Sidon.’ Does this passage give us a clue to how God works?

As we reach the end of the liturgical year, a year dedicated to prayer, maybe we can consider our own thoughts on praying for miracles.

Did any of the Scripture passages speak to you?

What is a miracle?

Have you ever experienced/witnessed a miracle?

What are miracles for, what is their purpose?

Why do you think some are granted but not others?

What is expectant prayer?

May God bless you through your prayers.

If you would like to find out more about intercessory prayer in general or feel drawn to join one of the parish prayer groups, please contact me.

The Parish Prayerline Group currently prays for the intentions of anyone within the parish (all intentions are anonymised before being shared with the group). If you would like the group to pray for an intention for yourself, or a loved one, please email it to:

fjackson@stpeterswinchester.org.uk

‘O come and behold Him, born the King of Angels’

Music sits at the heart of school

Head teacher **Louise Buxton** reports on musical opportunities

This autumn term saw St Peter's Primary School take up the role of a lead primary school for music in Hampshire.

We are working alongside Hampshire Music Hub to share good practice and support other schools in their music provision. This role recognises the high quality of music at St Peter's.

Music has always sat at the heart of the school, and there is much to celebrate – as was recognised in our latest Ofsted inspection:

St Peter's has a long established tradition of music. The curriculum is well designed, engaging and inspiring children to develop a lifelong love of music. Our curriculum is practical, teaching children the skills of performing, composing, listening and reading notation, and where children learn about music through making music.

We provide a breadth of musical opportunities that span much of school life. There are 150 instrumental music lessons each week, ranging from woodwind, brass and string instruments to guitar, piano, singing and drumming!

Our children say:

Hope told us: 'I play the cello and piano. I am Grade 3 on the cello. I like the low sound of the cello compared with the violin. It is beautiful and melodic. I practise pretty much every day!'

Zara said: 'I play the piano and the clarinet. I am really enjoying the clarinet as a second instrument. At school band I am able to share my talent for piano playing.'

Every year we celebrate our instrumental learning at our spring concert where children play solo, in small groups or as part of our school band. The school band also plays at our



Above and below: Scenes from The Lion King.



their African drumming pieces, which they'd been learning in lessons.

Matteo said: 'I really enjoyed *The Lion King*. There was lots of movement and it was quite active which made it fun and enjoyable. It was great fun but we couldn't have had the production without the help of the teachers, Mrs Postlethwaite and us working together as a team.'

We believe that music is a powerful tool that impacts children's wider development.

At St Peter's music is an important part of the spiritual experience for children, along with supporting well-being and emotional health.

Through music children also develop their physical co-ordination, resilience and perseverance. They build community, confidence and self-esteem, as well as learning the joys and discipline of working with a common collaborative purpose – or as we often say here, 'Team St Peter's!'

"Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination and life to everything." — Plato

summer fair each year, and our worship band leads music at Mass and liturgy. The Advent service is a special liturgy attended by our wider school community and enriched by the music, with even the staff singing a liturgical piece in four parts!

One of the highlights of the school year is our annual summer production. Last year the children performed *The Lion King*, with four performances and two main casts, and every child taking to the stage as singers, actors, dancers or in the chorus, while one year group performed

'The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight'

Picture gallery from *The Lion King*



*"Music gives a soul to the universe,
wings to the mind, flight to the
imagination and life to everything."
— Plato*



'When the snow lay round about, deep and crisp and even'

A culture of friends bringing friends

More news from **Allegra Matunda** about Alpha

Got questions? Try Alpha! You are invited, you are welcome...

By the time this issue of CrossKeys is published, we will be nearing the end of our autumn season of Alpha.

As always, Alpha is a great joy and blessing for both team and guests as, together, we explore the big questions around faith, life, and God in a relaxed and safe environment. Alpha runs on a culture of invitation, *friends bringing friends* to a conversation about faith, life, and God which is authentic and unforced.

Below we hear from previous guests about their Alpha journey...

At the start of each new season, we invite all parishioners to pray for the next Alpha course and to ask God to place on our hearts the name(s) of people we could invite. Does this work?

Here **Alessandra** shares how, unbeknown to her until much later, her friend had placed her name in *that* basket...

My Alpha journey began when someone else put my name in the basket without me knowing this. For a couple of years, I listened to others share their experiences and thought, 'This sounds really interesting,' before deciding to take this journey for myself. What had held me back for so long was my fear of entering a room where I didn't know anyone.

During the Alpha course, we touched on topics I had never been able to explore before. It was good to be able to ask questions in a safe space without being judged or simply listen to others' perspectives. In one of the sessions, we discussed the theme of forgiveness. I cannot forget the fulfillment and joy I felt in realising the freedom that gives us to forgive oth-



ers or ourselves! And this probably wouldn't have happened without the Alpha!

Attending Alpha not only strengthened my faith, but also built up in me a feeling of belonging, both to our church and to our community, because I think that together we can achieve more than on our own.

So, if you know someone else who would benefit from the Alpha journey as much as I did but have not yet joined the course, put his or her name in the basket next time you are invited to do so because God works in mysterious ways...



Ted and Jill joined Alpha as a married couple and are helpers in the current season. Here they share their experience as a couple...

T: Over recent years we have heard various people speak about Alpha after Mass. Last year, we decided to take the plunge and see

what it was all about. It was a great decision!

The welcome that we received from the Alpha team from day one was a key part. Following on from this, a shared meal with new people was a relaxing start to the session. The talks that followed the meal were thought-provoking, inspiring and enlightening but also challenging.

Being placed in smaller groups after the talks meant that there was the opportunity to reflect and to discuss issues arising. However, there was never any pressure to say anything in the group. It would have been perfectly acceptable just to sit and listen. It was reassuring that each session began and ended on time. The time allocated to each session was used well and the finishing time was respected.

The title of a book I've been reading is 'All the light we cannot see', by Anthony Doerr. This sums up for me why I chose to participate in Alpha: to experience more clearly the light and unconditional love of Jesus in my life and in our church community.

J: Regarding the format of the evening and how it worked for us as a couple, we were asked before the start of the course whether we would prefer to be put into different groups or separate ones. Either would have been acceptable but we opted to be in different groups from each other. This worked well for us, which might seem strange to some. Why attend something together and then 'do' our own thing? I think that it's probably true that each of us, not surprisingly, had slightly different reasons for wanting to do Alpha in the first instance, so it made sense for us to work through some of these reasons separately.

However, during the time of Alpha and afterwards we found our separate

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'Frosty wind made moan, Earth stood hard as iron, Water like a stone'

An opportunity to deepen one's faith

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experience jointly enriching. How?

Well, we are far more likely to pray together now than before, and to consider plans that we may make in a different way.

We have a better understanding of each other's individual experience of faith. We discuss our belief more openly together.

We think about how welcoming or not we are to those who come to our home.

We also laugh more because the joy that flows from our faith has grown through Alpha.

We openly trust God more and give our worries to God. And that does lead us to holding things more lightly.

I wish that we hadn't left it so long to take part! We joined the team this season to help journey alongside others and have looked to experiencing Alpha again; all the fun that goes with it, the new friends and a deepening of faith.'

We have been running Alpha in the parish since 2018. Can it really make a continuing impact on one's journey of faith or is it just a one-off experience? God alone is the one who touches hearts and brings

change and transformation, His timing always perfect.

Stella, a member of the parish since 2010 came on the Alpha course in 2022. Here, she shares about the continuing impact of that decision in her life of faith and relationship to God...

Alpha opened my mind to reading Scripture and to listen to the word of God more attentively. Attending Alpha helped me rediscover and deepen my faith.

I have connected with a lot of other parishioners and have made many friends within the church. I belong to groups where we share Scripture and pray for each other which has helped strengthen my faith journey and brought me peace.

I have been able to pray more confidently for and with others for guidance in everyday life, including in times of challenge.

I am more able to accept when I fail myself and/or others as well as letting go which I couldn't do before.

I have gained the courage to go to Confession more regularly and attend Adoration more regularly. Through this growth in faith, I invest more time in prayer, and I have taken up the practice of fasting.

I now have a better understanding of



God's hand in whatever I go through. I had a lot of personal challenges, especially with my youngest son. Through Alpha, I was able to surrender everything to God in prayer and since then, I have felt God's hand in this with me''.

Could Alpha be a pivotal moment for you or someone you know?

The next season begins on Tuesday, 20 February, 2025.

For more information or to register, please visit:

www.catholicwinchester.org.uk or email:

alpha@stpetesrwinchester.org.uk

Open for all ages to participate



Sarah Layzell interviews Mike Elks about his Acorn experiences

Acorn groups have become a key part of parish life over the past four years – there are five thriving groups (with more to come) and around 50 people are active participants. Most groups are in-person, but there is an online option.

There's a wide range of ages, including our latest Acorn member – a baby who was born this autumn and whose mother brings him along to meetings ...of course, the rest of the group expect baby Olek to do his homework/reading and be ready to contribute in the meetings! Start as you mean to go on is what they say. They are loving their new baby Acorn...

Parishioner **Mike Elks** has been with his Acorn group from the beginning,

so we decided to ask him about his experiences.

Sarah: What were your expectations of Acorn groups?

Mike: I hoped to deepen my faith by sharing it with others, and it seemed a good step forward after Alpha. I really believe in the concept: you can share your thinking while knowing that what's said in the group stays in the group, so – as with Alpha – you

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'He came down to earth from heaven, Who is God and Lord of all'

The power of testimonies is key

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get a good open conversation, no right and no wrong.

S: How were the first few meetings?

M: Interesting! Our group is online, with people joining from 100 miles away.

[Note: We started Acorn groups while still social distancing through the pandemic. Having offered Alpha online, we decided that those who had joined us for this, even outside the parish, would also benefit from being part of the Acorn groups].

We settled in very quickly – we'd got used to these kinds of discussions in Alpha. I find it quite easy to share openly on most things, and we bonded together as a group quickly. It has all gone pretty much as I would have hoped and it has consolidated my faith.

S: You've been in your group for nearly four years. How does the reality match up to your expectations?

M: The power of testimonies is key: people can't argue with how I feel, and I can't argue with how someone else feels. It's certainly helped me to develop a closeness with others. And, I am closer to Jesus through these discussions in our group.

We have a WhatsApp group, and there's a lot going on there. It's a lovely place to ask for prayers and support. We are extremely close, far closer than I would have thought. It has exceeded what I thought.

S: How has the group influenced your faith life?

M: We started off with a prayer course. Then we read the life of a Saint – something I wouldn't normally think about doing. The discipline of reading a chapter, then discussing it, then presenting to the other group – at the time I thought



Left: Baby Olek with his mother and right: Mike Elks.

'do we really need this?' but then when you've done it you feel the benefit.

Then there were the Lent groups, the Old Testament study – all very powerful.

S: The theme for the next year is Discipleship. How might we now begin to teach others?

M: I feel more comfortable talking about faith now, whereas two to three years ago I wouldn't have dreamt of talking about it. But in the ministries I help support, faith is important, and my Acorn group experiences affect how I can support those ministries. Faith is what gets you out of bed in the morning!

There are really good things going on in the parish. Positive moves, and joy, and stuff growing

S: Might you be a disciple without realising?

M: What is a disciple? It's probably what I want to be – I don't know how good I would be at it. The bar could be very high. But so long as you get started – keep the faith and you'll grow!

S: Fantastic! Talk to me about your experience of the weekend retreats.

M: Firstly, there was getting to know the bigger group. Then, the environment was peaceful and unpressured: restful, prayerful. The chapel, the services, the music were all lovely. And the food was great!

The spirituality was intense, powerful, prophetic – and it remains with me. We achieved a closeness through prayer. So, certainly I enjoyed the retreats. Sociable too – a good mix of faith and friendship.

S: What would you say to anyone considering an Acorn Group but not sure if it's for them?

Mike: You've got to try it! If you're happy with the concept of the small group then you can open your heart and your mind without fear of being wrong, and that's massively empowering and strengthening. I would recommend it!

The Holy Spirit is at work.

To join us in an Acorn group or for more information, [email us](mailto:email_us@acorn@stpeterswinchester.org.uk) at acorn@stpeterswinchester.org.uk

'Lullay, thou little tiny child, Sleep well, lully, lullay'

Learning about Chaldean Christians

Antonia Whitley offers a personal reflection of Archbishop Bashar Matti Warda's talk to the parish

What a privilege it was to attend the talk given at the Milner Hall by Archbishop Bashar Warda of Erbil, in the Kurdistan area of Iraq, on Saturday 19 October.

The session was informal yet very informative. The first half took the format of a question and answer session in which Father Mark asked the Archbishop a series of questions so that we, the audience, could grasp the essence of his role, the community he leads and the difficulties they face in today's conflicted world.

We learned that Erbil, situated to the north of Baghdad, has a Christian community of 8000 families; that there have been three major displacements of Christians in recent times and diaspora to the US, Canada and Australia.

For those of us like myself, who did not know what Chaldean Christians adhered to, Archbishop Warda explained that at some point after the split between the Eastern and Western churches, the Chaldeans, though part of the Eastern Church, came into full communion with the Holy See, under the Pope in Rome, in other words that they are a Roman Catholic part of the Eastern Church.



Archbishop Bashar Warda.

Archbishop Warda told us about his own background. He made many of us smile when he recounted how in his secondary school, he was among seventeen boys picked out to be sent to the seminary; one got the impression that the boys were not consulted as to whether they saw the priesthood as their future...

He was ordained in 1993 and later joined the Redemptorists in Belgium,

before returning to Iraq.

In the second half of the talk, Father Mark opened up the floor to the audience and there followed a lively flow of seven to ten questions which the Archbishop replied to in considerable detail.

Archbishop Warda has a privileged insight into the life of the diminishing Christian population in the Middle East.

While recognising that ongoing conflict there was draining his society and that they longed for peace, he pointed out that in the West, culture was the enemy of Christ, by which I understood him to mean social media principally.

I was especially struck when he told us that in the society in which he lives, all other religious and ethnic groups see Christians as **good, honest, trustworthy and kind people**. These other groups will go to the Christian leaders to have issues and disputes resolved or even to ask for help to understand any tax or other financial problems they might have. The Christians are considered by others in that society, in his words, as 'the salt of the earth'.

As Father Mark has already pointed out in the newsletter, it was very moving to hear the Archbishop chant the Our Father in (Neo) Aramaic.

Christmas carol quiz answers

Page 2: Hark! The Herald Angels Sing; Page 3: Away in a Manger; Page 4: God, Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen; Page 5: O Come All, Ye Faithful; Page 6: O Little Town Of Bethlehem; Page 7: Good King Wenceslas; Page 8: In the Bleak Midwinter; Page 9: Once in Royal David's City; Page 10: Coventry Carol; Page 11: Ding Dong Merrily On High; Page 12: Sussex Carol.

Centenary year plans announced

In the last issue we promised to give more details of our plans for the Centenary Year of St Peter's church in 2026.

On the back page of this edition we present the calendar of events we plan to hold in 2026 as we want to give you a full year's notice so you can plan to attend as many as possible. It promises to be a year of great joy and celebrating across the parish.

We have given each month a theme with the overall theme being 'A place for all'. The headings give you some idea of the events and we will add more details on each throughout 2025.

We will be holding open monthly meetings in 2025 (for dates check Peter-Post) to plan the delivery of all these events and may even fit in a few more.

We need plenty of volunteers so get in touch on

centenary@stpeterswinchester.org.uk and be part of the preparations.

'Gloria Hosanna in excelsis!'

Centenary celebrations calendar

JANUARY 2026 – LAUNCH OF CENTENARY YEAR AND CENTENARY CHRONICLE BOOK	
Saturday 17 January	Launch of Centenary Book – followed by reception in Pastoral Centre
FEBRUARY — LIGHT	
31 January to 2 February 1 and 2 February 6 February	Floodlight Celebrations of St Peter’s Church – inside and outside Feast of Candlemas St Peter’s Pageant – Directed by Susan Hume
MARCH — MUSIC	
Sunday 8 March at 7.15 pm	Concert with Fr Andrew Moore. To raise money for Night shelter and Trinity Hospice
APRIL — ART	
Week of 27 April	Exhibition of Art in the Pastoral Centre
MAY — PENTECOST	
Sunday 24 May	Pentecost Celebration with Churches Together
JUNE — FAMILY AND CHILDREN	
Dates to be confirmed Friday 26 June Sunday 28 June	9 Day Novena (“Festival of Faith”) leading up to Feast Ss Peter & Paul Vigil Mass BBQ Party at St Peter’s School Feast of St Peter and St Paul
JULY — CELEBRATION	
Saturday 11 July (or 15 July) All Dates/times tbc	Anniversary of St Peter’s Church Mass at 5.30pm Bishop and other priests who have served at St Peter’s Followed by Party in the Pastoral Centre
Tuesday 14 or	Solemn Vespers 6pm
Wednesday 15 July	Mayor and Civic Community followed by refreshments (Church was opened on 15 July 1926)
AUGUST — HOLIDAYS	
First week in August tbc Last week in August	Parish Pilgrimage to Walsingham Parish walk from Alresford to Stockbridge via St Peter’s and St Stephen’s
SEPTEMBER— YOUTH AND HISTORY	
Freshers’ week Week of Winchester Heritage Open Days	Party for Youth – Hog Roast / BBQ. To include input from and catered specifically for the youth in the Parish. Guided Tours of the church Lecture on Parish origins in the Milner Hall
OCTOBER — WITNESS	
Half Term tbc Friday 30 October 2026	Pilgrimage to St Peter’s, Rome Launch of 100 Faith Stories book Feast of the Winchester Martyrs
NOVEMBER — OUTREACH	
Bamenda Sunday	Special Mass and fundraising event for Bamenda Link with other St Peter Churches around the world celebrating centenary Outreach Ministry Events
DECEMBER — “I WISH IT COULD BE CHRISTMAS EVERY DAY”	
Date tbc Friday 25 December	Carol Concert at St Peter’s Church – by School Christmas Day
JANUARY – “Closing of Centenary Year and Celebrating the beginning the next Century”	
	Photographic display of the year in the Pastoral Centre Mass/celebration for the Closing of the Centenary Year

CrossKeys welcomes letters, stories and photographs
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‘On Christmas night all Christians sing. To hear the news the angels bring’