



St Luke's News

February 2026

Number 288

The Paddington Principle



AI-generated image (Chat GPT) using specific prompts

According to *The Grocer* magazine, when the first Paddington movie was released 12 years ago, it prompted a huge surge in the sales of marmalade; some companies reporting a 24% increase. Scenes of juicy oranges being turned into sticky deliciousness, spread on sandwiches, set the nation's tastebuds tingling. But the influence on British culture of Michael Bond's famous creation has been much more widespread than *Golden Shred*. The stories of Paddington and his adopted family, the Browns, have entertained the nation for nearly 70 years, but on close inspection they also pose a number of challenges for us as a Christian community.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus delivered the foundational guideline of kindness, often called the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (*Matthew 7:12* and *Luke 6:31*). Whilst Paddington's catchphrase "If we're kind and polite, the world will be right" is slightly more one-sided, the principle stands strong, that we should always treat others with the kindness, respect and consideration we seek for ourselves.

And this small bear of impeccable manners reminds us of this call as he makes his way around Windsor Gardens always putting kindness first.

As the famous saying goes, 'When life hands you lemons, make lemonade'. We are of course talking about a different fruit, but for a bear so fond of citrus, he seems to hold no bitterness. As an orphaned refugee from Latin America, he has every right to feel hard done by, but his gentleness, integrity, vulnerability and politeness are irresistible, and immediately begin to influence and change people around him! In return, Paddington engenders the warmest of welcomes and most generous hospitality from his adopted family, the Browns. He often messes up, and floods the house or covers the kitchen in marmalade, but the Browns keep on loving him! And that reminds us that we are all God's adopted children (*Ephesians 1:5* and *2:19*). We are loved and forgiven unconditionally by God, no matter how many times, or how seriously we might get things wrong.

And this ability to see the best in people, to forgive, and to practise grace makes Paddington a superb bridge-builder. He draws those on the edge of the community towards the centre. Mr Curry is a perfect example, but the truth is, that it is Mrs Brown who sets this cycle in motion. Her willingness to see the refugee bear as a full member of her family from the moment she meets him, helps these qualities blossom in Paddington. The wonderful *Paddington: The Musical* now showing in London, written by Tom Fletcher of McFly fame, has many memorable tunes, but possibly the most moving contains the following lines sung by Mrs Brown as she reflects on her first, chance encounter with the bear ...

*"From the moment I saw his face
The second I heard his voice
Something fell into place
Like I never had a choice
Didn't know we were incomplete
But it was so obvious
If he's looking for family
Then he's already one of us"*

What a challenge Mary Brown lays before us — the same aspiration Jesus seeks. We like to hope that we are each striving to love all we meet like Christ but as this song suggests, he calls us to go further, and to see each person as He sees them. He calls us to open our family homes and break open our comfortable cliques to welcome others in; to recognise that our community is as yet incomplete, and as others arrive, to seek to immediately recognise them as one of us. As people walk through the

door of St Luke's, no matter how unfamiliar or different, we are called to see them, and respond to them as kin.

Finally, Paddington is also a bear who stands up for things. He keeps going no matter what. He is always optimistic, determined to stick up for his friends and family, and to see the good in others. He even sometimes gives people 'hard stares' to challenge and call out improper behaviour, showing that it doesn't matter how small you are, we all can, and should, uphold what is right. Jesus was able to convince people to change in a loving way; He was always loyal and fair and stood up to injustice. It challenges us as Christians to hone our sense of right and wrong, to examine the depth of our faith and to invest more deeply in the friendships we create.

Paddington embodies boundless compassion, the ability to gently bring out the best in others and the desire to connect and build community. In and through our love for Christ, may we bring much hope and joy to others around us and each seek in this, to be a little more like Jesus, and in turn, like this iconic duffel-coat clad cub.

Neil Brookes
Ordinand and Youth Director



20th anniversary celebrations
You're invited

Friday 8th May
Church Open Afternoon 2 to 5pm

Saturday 9th May
Community Family Fun Day 12 noon to 5pm

Sunday 10th May
Thanksgiving Service and church family lunch
Save the dates
10.30am to 2pm

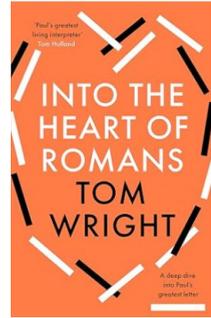
Keep updated:
stlukeswatford.org/20-years



Spring Sermon Series

Morning services at 10:30am

From the beginning of Lent, we are going to study in depth chapter 8 in Paul's letter to the *Romans*. Based on the book *Into the Heart of Romans* by Tom Wright, we will be covering a few verses each week over 9 weeks. I am sure we will find it inspiring as it is the key chapter in this letter. It contains deep theological insight and reveals God's overall purposes and plans for His people and His creation.



Encounter services at 5:30pm

In the 13 weeks from the beginning of Lent through to Pentecost, we are going to reflect on 13 names of God mentioned in the Old Testament. Each name reveals something more about the Living God.

Revd Michael Norman
Vicar of St Luke's

Holy Week Services



Monday 30th March	7:30pm	Compline*, in the Chapel
Tuesday 31st March	10:00am	Holy Communion, in the Church
	7:30pm	Compline, in the Chapel
Wednesday 1st April	7:30pm	Compline, in the Chapel
Maundy Thursday		
Thursday 2nd April	7:30pm	Holy Communion, in the Church
Good Friday		
Friday 3rd April	9:45am	Walk of Witness
	10:30am	Journey to the Cross, in the Church
	2:00pm	Hour at the Cross, in the Church
	7:30pm	Compline, in the Chapel
Holy Saturday		
Saturday 4th April	8:00pm	First Service of Easter, in the Church
Easter Sunday		
Sunday 5th April		For Services, see page 6

* The Compline service is a peaceful, reflective service of around half an hour, with a reflection on Jesus' journey to the cross and beyond.

Services at St Luke's Church

Sunday

8:00am Holy Communion Service

This is a said Communion and is held once a month in the Chapel at St Luke's. All are welcome.

10:30am Morning Service/Holy Communion Service

This is our main morning service, and is currently available live-streamed on YouTube. All are welcome, and there are usually children's groups and a crèche for younger ones. The details in the calendar below may change.

5:30pm Encounter - Informal Evening Service

This service includes worship, a talk and opportunities to be prayed for.

Tuesday

10:00am Holy Communion Service

We also have a weekly Communion (or Service of the Word if the Vicar is unavailable) at 10:00am on Tuesdays. This is a lovely, reflective service with a couple of hymns, followed by community tea and coffee.

Plan for Sunday Services:

February	8:00am	10:30am	5:30pm
Sunday 15th		Morning Worship with Drama <i>A Maltese welcome</i> <i>Acts 27 and 28</i>	Encounter with Holy Communion <i>Rome</i> <i>Acts 28:17-31</i>
Wednesday 18th Ash Wednesday			Holy Communion Note: 7:30pm start
Sunday 22nd		Family Communion <i>Introduction to the Book of Romans</i>	Encounter <i>El Elohe – The Mighty God of Israel</i>
March	8:00am	10:30am	5:30pm
Sunday 1st		Morning Worship <i>There is no Condemnation</i> <i>Romans 8:1-4</i>	Encounter with Holy Communion <i>Jehovah Rapha: God who Heals</i>

Note: The forms of service and sermon titles may change.

March (cont'd)	8:00am	10:30am	5:30pm
Sunday 8th	Holy Communion	Morning Worship <i>The Spirit Gives Life</i> <i>Romans 8:5-11</i>	Encounter <i>Jehovah Jira: The Lord our Provider</i>
Sunday 15th Mothering Sunday		All-age Worship with Parade	Encounter with Holy Communion <i>Jehovah Mekaddishkem: The God who Sanctifies</i>
Sunday 22nd Passion Sunday		Family Communion <i>Led by the Spirit</i> <i>Romans 8:12-17</i>	Confirmation with the Bishop of Hertford
Sunday 29th Palm Sunday		Morning Worship <i>Liberation of Creation</i> <i>Romans 8:17-21</i>	Encounter <i>Jehovah Shalom: The Lord of Peace</i>
Holy Week — see page 4			
April	8:00am	10:30am	5:30pm
Sunday 5th Easter Sunday	Holy Communion	Family Communion <i>Easter Readings</i>	Encounter <i>Jehovah Sabaoth: The Lord of Hosts</i>
Sunday 12th		Morning Worship <i>The Groaning of the Spirit</i> <i>Romans 8:22-27</i>	Encounter <i>El Olan: The Everlasting God</i>
Sunday 19th		Family Communion <i>Justified and Glorified</i> <i>Romans 8:28-30</i>	Encounter <i>El Shaddai: God Almighty</i>
Sunday 26th		Morning Worship <i>If God is For Us</i> <i>Romans 8:31-34</i>	Encounter with Holy Communion <i>Jehovah Tsidkenu: The Lord our Righteousness</i>

Note: The forms of service and sermon titles may change.

Regular groups at St Luke's Church

Children/Youth Groups (evenings, term-time)

Kids Club	Tuesdays	5:30–6:45pm	7–11 year olds
Rock Solid	Mondays	6:30–7:45pm	Years 7–9
Base	Tuesdays	6:30–7:45pm	Years 9–11
K2	Tuesdays	8:00–9:15pm	Years 11–13

Badminton and Table Tennis Club

Friday evenings (except 2 weeks at Christmas and Good Friday),
7:30–10:30pm, in the Church hall and Gathering Area
For more information, speak to Fiona Craigie

Breakfast Club

Every other Saturday, 8:30–10:00am
For more information, speak to Bekki Hadley

Cassiobury and nearby Community Choir (CanCC)

Wednesday evenings, term-time, 8:00pm in the Church
For more information, speak to Jeremy Cooke

Creative Space

Craft activities for women, monthly
For more information, speak to Pam Norman

Friday Club

Monthly, last Friday in the month (except in December when it will be on 19th)
For more information, speak to Janet G

Knitting Group

Monthly on a Monday morning
For more information, contact Di via the church office

Prayer

FOCUS, Tuesdays, 8:00pm: every week by Zoom (for login details contact the church office), apart from 2nd Tuesday in the month which is in person, in the Chapel

Prayer for Children & Youth, Thursdays, 11.15am, term-time, in the Chapel
Hour of Prayer, Fridays, 10:00–11:00 am, in the Chapel

Half-day of Prayer, 1st Saturday in the month, 9:00am–12 noon, in the Chapel

Toddlers

Thursday mornings, term-time, 9:30–11:00am
For more information, speak to Bekki Hadley

Diary dates coming up

February

- 13th Holiday Club Short: Pancake Party, 5:00-7:00pm
14th Breakfast Club (see p 14)
14th, 15th Snowdrop Garden Open Day, The Bishop of St Albans' Garden, Abbey Gate House, Abbey Mill Lane, AL3 4HD
18th Ash Wednesday Holy Communion Service, 7:30pm
21st Creative Space (see p 34)
21st, 22nd Snowdrop Garden Open Day, The Bishop of St Albans' Garden, Abbey Gate House, Abbey Mill Lane, AL3 4HD
27th Friday Club Tea Party, 2:30pm
28th Breakfast Club (see p 14)
Watford Symphony Orchestra, 7:30 pm, St Luke's Church (see p 25)

March

- 6th World Day of Prayer, 2:00pm, St Mary's Church (see p 10)
7th Half-day of Prayer, St Luke's Chapel, 9:00am–12 noon
8th Bring & Share Church Community Lunch
Sunday Afternoon Recital, 3:00pm, Charis Sykesud (Violin), Jack Redman (Piano): Strauss *Violin Sonata*, Clara Schumann *Romances*. Free entry, donations welcome. Tea and coffee afterwards
14th Breakfast Club (see p 14)
15th Mothering Sunday Service, 10:30am
21st Creative Space (see p 34)
22nd Confirmation Service with the Bishop of Hertford, 5:30pm
27th Friday Club Tea Party, 2:30pm
Holiday Club Short: Easter Celebration, 5:00-7:00pm
28th Breakfast Club (see p 14)

April

- 4th Half-day of Prayer, St Luke's Chapel, 9:00am–12 noon
6th Easter Monday Pilgrimage to St Albans (more details nearer the date)
18th Creative Space (see p 34)
24th Friday Club Tea Party, 2:30pm

May

- 2nd Half-day of Prayer, St Luke's Chapel, 9:00am–12 noon
8th-10th 20th Anniversary Celebrations (see p 3)
16th Creative Space, 10:00-11:30am, Informal Bring & Share Craft
17th Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM), 10:30am
29th Friday Club Tea Party, 2:30pm

Tell us what St Luke's means to you



The original St Luke's church is what is now the church hall. Twenty years ago the building that includes the current church — along with meeting rooms, a quality kitchen and many other facilities — was built. It was hoped the

enlarged building would provide a versatile Christian focal point for people on the Cassiobury estate and beyond.

If you come to St Luke's, we're interested in hearing what the current church means to you: a place of prayer or something more? Perhaps a place of fellowship, a quiet space, somewhere to go where you can enjoy a cup of coffee, maybe a breakfast, a bit of badminton or membership of one of the special interest groups? Maybe you're a volunteer?

Irrespective of what your connection is, whether you're young, old or in between, if you can find the time, let us know what you get from St Luke's. In preparation for the 20th Anniversary Celebrations in May, we would like to hear your thoughts. A selection will be published in the next issue of this magazine. Please email your reflections to [Susan Miller \(susan-miller@ntlworld.com\)](mailto:susan-miller@ntlworld.com) or the church office (office@stlukeswatford.org) by 31st March. We look forward to hearing from you.



Prayer

FOCUS

Tuesdays 8:00pm every week by Zoom (details from the church office), apart from 2nd Tuesday in the month which is in person, in the Chapel

**Prayer for Children & Youth
Thursdays 11:15am in the Chapel (during term time)**

**Hour of Prayer
Fridays 10:00-11:00am in the Chapel**

**Half-day of Prayer
1st Saturday in the month 9:00am-12 noon in the Chapel**

World Day of Prayer 2026 Friday 6th March

“I Will Give You Rest: Come”

Matthew 11:28-30



The 2026 World Day of Prayer materials from Nigeria bring us a powerful invitation drawn from *Matthew 11:28-30*. At a time when people worldwide are carrying heavy burdens, our Nigerian sisters offer profound insights into finding rest in God.

Through their exploration of different kinds of burdens — shame, systemic oppression, religious persecution, poverty and despair — the writers help us understand both the weight of human suffering and the depths of divine rest. Their work shows us that true rest isn't just about physical relief, but about transformation through God's grace and community support.

The Nigerian committee has woven together their cultural wisdom with the universal need for rest. Through symbols like the calabash bowl, which represents both daily sustenance and divine provision, they remind us how God meets us in our weariness.

For more information, visit <https://worlddayofprayer.net/nigeria-2026.html>

The Watford meeting is being hosted by St Mary's Church at 2:00pm on Friday 6th March and will be followed by refreshments at 3:00pm.

All are welcome – not just women.



Stay connected

To learn more about services, Our LifeGroups and other church activities you can take part in, email the office to get the weekly email sent on Fridays (office@stlukeswatford.org)

Exploring Faith Together Through Alpha

Alpha is all about creating a relaxed, welcoming space where people can explore the Christian faith and ask life's big questions — no pressure and no judgement. It began back in 1977 at Holy Trinity Brompton in London and, nearly 50 years on, it's still going strong. Today, Alpha runs all over the world in churches, homes, cafes and prisons, helping millions of people explore what faith might mean for them.



Alpha is for anyone — whether you're new to church, curious about Christianity, or just wanting to revisit the basics. Each session looks at a different topic, with plenty of opportunity to chat, listen and share thoughts along the way. There are no right or wrong answers — just honest conversations...and lots of laughs!

Our latest Alpha course at St Luke's started on 24th September with an introductory meal and finished on 3rd December. Each evening followed a familiar and much-loved format. We began with a shared meal — a vital part as food has a remarkable way of breaking down barriers and building community and it quickly became a highlight of the course. We were treated to some delicious food cooked by amazing volunteers, supported by super-efficient washing-up teams!

After eating together, we watched an Alpha video that introduced the theme for the evening, before splitting into two smaller discussion groups. These group conversations are at the heart of Alpha — a chance to share thoughts, questions and experiences in a friendly, supportive and safe setting.

One of the highlights of the recent course was a fantastic day away at Christ Church in Chorleywood. This special day focused on the Holy Spirit and provided a chance to step away from the normal routine, spend extended time together and reflect more deeply. For many, it was a meaningful and memorable experience that marked an important point in their Alpha journey.



St Luke's Alpha team (from left): Adrian, Helen, Mave, Dave, me, Larry, Nikki, Ricky

As the course came to an end in December, there was a real sense of gratitude — for the

On the Holy Spirit
Awayday, it was as if the
scales fell from my eyes

No question
too basic!

Moved so much
further along the
faith road

Fun, enlightening,
faith-strengthening

A relaxed, welcoming
environment to explore
Christianity each week

Honesty of the
people and our
journey together

AMAZING!

Friendly people
and lovely food
each week

Feedback from the recent Alpha course

friendships formed and the conversations shared. Alpha once again proved to be about much more than a course; it's about community.

Looking ahead, we are already excited for the next Alpha course and what it will bring. If this recent course is anything to go by, it promises to be another great opportunity to connect and explore faith with honesty, laughter and plenty of good food along the way!

Helen Booth

We're on Social Media

Facebook: 🍷
@stlukeschurchwatford

Instagram: 📷
@stlukeswatford

Behind the Scenes at Greenbelt

“So what do you do the rest of the year?”

This is a common response when I tell someone new that my job is Managing Director of a festival that happens just once a year!

But in reality putting on an event for 10,000 Christians and a loyal band of 1,200 volunteers each August bank holiday with a staff team of just 8 really is a full-time job. And this year to add into the mix we are also on the hunt for a new festival site, so I have been travelling all over the country looking at potential new venues. This is alongside all our regular activities like selling tickets, booking the programme, working with partners and volunteers, setting budgets, keeping an eye on the finances, and much more. There really never is a quiet part of the year — it just builds to a crescendo in August.

In actuality, we are not just a weekend event, more a community of like-minded Christians who gather once a year for learning, celebration and challenge. Who then, recharged, take those ideas and experiences back to their home churches year round.

This summer is our last festival in the beautiful surroundings of Boughton House near Kettering. So if you have ever wondered about seeing what Greenbelt Festival is all about, this year really is the time to visit.



“It’s a place that I keep on coming back to and never want to be away from.”

Pádraig Ó Tuama, Irish poet



“Absolute highlight of my summer!” *Fifi*

- We’ve made some early lineup announcements which you can check out here: <https://www.greenbelt.org.uk>
- You can buy tickets here: <https://www.greenbelt.org.uk/buy-tickets/> (we’ve introduced ‘pay what you can afford’ and ‘interest-free payment plan’ options)
- And one of the things I’m working on at the moment is getting our volunteer applications live; you can find out more



about volunteering and register your interest here:
<https://www.greenbelt.org.uk/volunteer/>

Do come and chat to me if you have questions or would like to find out more.

"It's a soul thing. It's a heart thing. It's a loving justice, loving people, reconnecting with God's spirit,

discerning the truth, feeling joy thing. It's a taste of heaven."

Christopher, Greenbelter

If that sounds intriguing, why not join us this summer!

Derek Hill

RISE & SHINE! IT'S
Breakfast Club

Start your family weekend with a
tasty breakfast and fun activities

Saturday Mornings 8.30 to 10am

Join us on these Saturdays:
14th and 28th February, 14th and 28th March (dates in April and May tba)

40 Not Out! Second Innings

In the September 2025 issue of *St Luke's News*, our cricket-loving Vicar, Michael Norman, celebrated 40 years in ordained ministry. He talked to Chris Webb about his journey to Christian faith, his call to become a priest and his time at St Barnabas in Weston-super-Mare. Alas, play had to stop when we ran out of space, so there was little mention of the 21 years at his next church, St Saviour's in Bath.



St Saviour's, Larkhall, Bath

Let play recommence ... Revd Michael Norman talks to Chris Webb

Why did you move to Bath?

"I'd had a great time in Weston-super-Mare but after nine years I felt it was time to move on. There was a vacancy at St Saviour's in Larkhall, Bath. I applied, along with five others, and got the job."

How did the parish compare to the last one?

"Weston-super-Mare was in the middle of a council estate, whereas Larkhall had a mixture of rich households, middle income groups and some mixed council and home-owned housing. It was one of the largest parishes in Bath with around 9,000 parishioners."

"The St Saviour's church building, which was built in 1832, was not suited to the 21st century. The heating system was on its last legs and the wooden pews were uncomfortable. It was a tall building so any heat generated went to the roof. It was so tall an architect told us we could fit three storeys inside."

One of Michael's first challenges was to improve the church to make it more of a community hub. In 2000/2001 the congregation campaigned to raise funds to convert the interior to three storeys to create more flexibility and space for the church family and local community.

"The problem was there was no church hall, although the church did have a coffee shop in the High Street. This was quite popular and we used it for our Alpha meetings which were a great success." But it wasn't a church hall...

St Saviour's raised around £200,000 towards the project and in 2001, work began on *phase 1*: gutting the ground floor, installing underfloor heating, adding a meeting area, installing a glazed entrance area and moving the



St Saviour's before the building works



toilets and kitchen. Most of the wooden pews were sold, and new chairs added to a now fully carpeted worship area.

What happened to the Sunday services while the building work was being done?

“All the local schools were Church of England schools, and I had a good relationship with the head teachers. While the church was being gutted, we were able to transfer our Sunday services to the Secondary school.”

With a large parish of around 2,500 dwellings, around 2002–2005

Michael and his team began a giant round of prayer visiting. One of these

visits had an outcome that had a remarkable parallel to St John's Gospel.

“On one visit, two of our team met Judith, who asked for prayers for her former sister-in-law. It turned out her sister-in-law had been a mental health nurse in the NHS but had suffered mental health issues herself and had given up work. Judith wanted to help but they had lost contact.

“That evening at around 7pm Amanda, one of the team, prayed that contact would be restored. Later, it transpired that at about the same time, Judith's phone rang and it was her long-lost sister-in-law. Our prayers had been answered.

“I was reminded of the story in *St John's Gospel*, chapter 4, where a royal official asks Jesus to go and heal his son who is close to death. Jesus replies: ‘You may go, your son will live’. The man departs and discovers that the fever left the child at the same time that Jesus said ‘your son will live’. Prayers answered at long distance and exactly on time.

“I invited Judith to the next Alpha meeting, and under the heading ‘Any answers to prayer’, Judith told her story. You could have heard a pin drop in the coffee shop. Judith was later confirmed and her sister-in-law's illness was cured and she returned to work as a Mental Health Nurse again.”

In among the good news there were also challenges. “We dreaded the quinquennial inspections, when an architect approved by the Diocese inspects the building and makes recommendations on any shortcomings.”

St Saviour's was built of relatively soft Bath stone, and it didn't need an architect to see that it had its problems. "Parts of the church parapets began breaking and falling off, even part of the pinnacle on the high tower broke away and fell. Repairs cost £200,000. God answered our prayers."

Despite these setbacks, Michael and three colleagues had not given up on the plan to build a three-storey structure inside the the old church with a community hub on the two levels above the ground floor.

Clearance had been given by the Diocese but a survey in 2011 put the cost at £550,000. The PCC said it would not be possible to raise that much money, and shelved the idea.

But the 'gang of four' worked on. "We had a number of chance meetings with people who had trusts that made donations to the church." One of these was a leading businessman who Michael met at an annual *Mayor Making Ceremony* at Bath Abbey, who said that, subject to an agreed business plan, his trust would give £50,000 matched pound-for-pound with any donation from the congregation.

Any business plan had to be agreed with the PCC. Michael and his team spent three days fasting and praying before the PCC meeting. This time, the PCC agreed unanimously to put the plan to the congregation. In a month-long appeal, the congregation pledged £120,000. "We had £70,000 in cash, plus the trust fund's £50,000 — a total of £240,000. The question was: what do we do with half the money?"

Michael was advised — and the PCC agreed — to go out to tender. The best bid from a local builder was £440,000. After contributions from other trusts, bequests and another gift day at which the congregation raised a further £80,000, the total was reached.

"The Bishop of Bath and Wells officially opened [the restored church] in mid-September 2016. The building was really transformed. We'd spent 9 months out of our building, this time at our Church of England Infant's School."

It wasn't all building work in Bath. Michael was also involved in some



St Saviour's after the building works

unusual conversions of people from other countries. For example, a woman from Iran came to the UK to nurse her sick mother, who lived near Bath. Her sister, who saw a notice about a healing service outside St Saviour's, decided to bring her along.

During the service the grieving sister came forward and sat on a chair. Michael and another church member started to pray for her. She began moving back and forwards in her chair. Suddenly she fell out of the chair on to the floor — luckily the carpet was soft and she was not hurt.

“We didn't see her again for about two weeks. When she appeared again, her sister, who spoke English, explained that while she was being prayed for and was moving backwards and forwards in her chair, she was experiencing darkness and light. Suddenly it was all light and she found herself on the floor. God by His Spirit was dramatically touching her.

“She said she would like to be baptised and 27 people witnessed her baptism. Because she didn't speak English, we gave her a Bible translated into Farsi. As Christians can be persecuted in Iran, we were worried about how she would get her Bible into the country but she said she would be able to do it through having connections at the Airport!”

And then you came here?

“To a set of new challenges. Luckily the St Luke's building is in good shape — I didn't need another church to restore...”



CanCC

Cassibury
and nearby
Community
Choir



**Wednesdays from 8pm
@ St Luke's Church, Watford**

Anyone welcome of any musical ability to join.

**Feel free to turn up on the night, or contact
music@stlukeswatford.org 01923 246161**



Knitting Group at St Luke's

St Luke's Knitting Group is led by Di Gibbs who has been heading up our group since well before Covid. We have 10 regular members who meet once a month in the Church Lounge or Gathering Area on a Monday morning from 10.00 am to mid-day, each one using their knitting and/or crocheting skills to produce useful garments and blankets for several organisations. We enjoy a cup of coffee/tea together and have a very happy time chatting as well as swapping ideas and discussing techniques.

Alternatives (a local charity supporting expectant mothers who are experiencing unplanned pregnancy) are happy to receive baby cardigans, hats, mittens and blankets, as well as older children's cardigans and jumpers.



Watford Schools Trust like us to knit hearts which they give to children in schools as a reminder of God's love for each of them.

Watford General Hospital needs adult blankets and sometimes premature baby clothes.



The charity we support in *Malawi* likes brightly coloured children's hats and cardigans of various sizes.

If you would like to join the St Luke's Knitting Group we would love to see you. If you are new to knitting you could start with a knitted square. We have donated wool available as well as knitting needles and patterns.



Jeanette Lawson

St Luke's Knitting Group dates to the end of 2026

23rd February	15th June	19th October
16th March	20th July	16th November
20th April	17th August	21st December
18th May	21st September	



20th Anniversary Appeal



For the 20th Anniversary year of the church complex, we want to celebrate, and also smarten up, St Luke's.

If you would like to make a gift towards smartening up St Luke's please reference it '20th Anniversary Appeal' (or '20th AA'). Your gift can be placed in one of the envelopes in the church (cheques made out to St Luke's Watford PCC) and given in the collection or directly to the Treasurer, or made as a bank transfer to the church bank account:

Account name: Parochial Church Council of St Luke's Watford
(an alternative name acceptable to some banks is PCC ST LUKES WFD)

Account number: 70687472

Sort code: 20-91-79

If you pay tax, please consider gift-aiding your donation.

Friday Club Tea Parties 2:30pm at St Luke's

Feb 27th

Mar 27th

Apr 24th

*Now all you people
At work bench and sink
Stop all your business
Have time to think.
Who else on his birthday
Is put back in a cot
That was only part one
Now read the lot.*



“Be still, and know that I am God”

(Psalm 46:10)

I often walk on Studland beach in Dorset with my two dogs. We have a regular route that takes us from the car park, through the sand dunes and back along the beach.

At the beginning of February, we set off on our normal walk a bit later than usual (3 pm). The dunes were extensively flooded due to the torrential rain and many paths were impassable. We had to go off-route several times and, before I knew it, I was completely lost.

I walked around for at least 40 minutes trying to find a way to the beach or the car park but it was like a maze with huge lakes of water everywhere. It was raining and cold and the light was beginning to fade. Not a soul in sight.

I prayed to God that He would help me find the way out. After that, I felt strangely calm and confident that everything would be OK.

It suddenly came to me to phone the National Trust office which is located on the beach and, with the help of the *what3words* app on my mobile phone (see details below), a member of staff was despatched to find me. It took him 25 minutes due to the flooding, but I suddenly heard my name being called in the distance. He led us safely to the car park. He told me he had just been getting ready to go home when the phone rang.

I had remained calm and cheerful throughout. It was only later that I realised we could have been there all night and the outcome could have been very different. I know that God protected me that day. He kept me calm and sent earthly help in the form of the National Trust man!

Sarah Innes



what3words is an app that everyone should have on their phone! It divides the entire planet into 3m x 3m squares, and assigns a unique three-word reference to each square. In my case, I read out the unique 3 words on my phone and my rescuer could see precisely where I was.

Whales at St Albans Cathedral

An extraordinary art installation brought three monumental sperm whale sculptures into the cathedral in January.

Crafted by British sculptor Tessa Campbell Fraser from recycled and sustainable materials, the whales (two adults and a calf), together with audio of whale song, evoked themes of interspecies communication, climate awareness, and the fragility of ocean life. Suspended in the nave (as if sleeping), this stunning art installation invited visitors to reflect on humanity's impact on the planet while celebrating the beauty and mystery of these magnificent creatures.



Alongside the exhibition, there was a packed programme of events for all ages from music and wellness sessions to activity trails for children, and even a Sea Shanty Festival!

To find out more about events at the cathedral, visit <https://www.stalbanscathedral.org/>.

Mothers' Sunday

Sun 15th March
10.30am



Come
and
join in

Being thankful for all women

Friday Club at St Luke's

My friend Barbara Roberts and I used to meet every Tuesday evening and shared our longing and passion to start a club for those who live alone. Then 34 years ago four of us joined together and Friday Club began — a time of fun, friendship and outreach. Over the years it has been enjoyed by so many people.

Now we meet every last Friday in each month at 2:30pm in the church lounge for cheerful chatter, then a quiz or amusing poems and share moving and sometimes hilarious stories. We celebrate Easter, Harvest and Christmas with a joyful service of heart-touching poems, stories, well-loved hymns, Bible readings and prayer.

Next, we go into the Gathering Area for a delicious cream tea and then home afterwards having enjoyed an afternoon of friendship, laughter and chatting.

We have a wonderful team who prepare the tea, get the tables laid and chairs in place, and then help to clear up afterwards.

We greet our members as they arrive with a warm welcome and a smile to show that the love and joy of knowing and living for Jesus is very much the reason for Friday Club — it's why we do it, and to give an afternoon of happiness to all who come.

Jan has written a poem which says it all.

Janet Gibbon

Friday Club

If you'd like a welcome and a friendly chat
To sit in warmth and comfort and talk of this
and that
If you like a story or a quiz to tease your brain
Someone to share a joke with, then you can
come again

If you like a scone or two, piled with jam and
cream
A slice of fruit or lemon cake set out by the
team
If you like friendly company and a cup of tea
Then why not come to Friday Club — it is the place to be!



Some of the Friday Club team

Jan Rees
January 2026

Reset: New Wine Women's Day

Reset was held at 11 locations across England on Saturday 7th February. Ten of us from St Luke's attended the event held at Christ Church Barnet, while three more went to St Paul's Ealing.



The St Luke's contingent at the Barnet event

New Wine is an evangelical Christian organisation based in the UK, that was founded in 1989. They describe their purpose as 'to see local churches changing nations' and their stated aim is:

"Through worship, teaching, and the power of the Holy Spirit, we seek to equip and empower leaders and congregations to bring renewal to their communities".

The day at Christ Church Barnet began with worship led by an amazingly talented worship band who were playing together for the first time that day. The day was themed around *Psalms 46* so both of the talks during the day focused on this Psalm. Our first speaker, Nicky, focused on verse 7:

"The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress".

She spoke about how the Psalm was a hymn of confidence, that God is our refuge and that He is a personal God who knows all of our names and is interested in what happens in our lives. She reminded us that wherever we go we will be on holy ground because God is with us and emphasised how important it is to trust God and be obedient.

Following a coffee break, which included lovely homemade cakes, we heard testimonies from a panel of women. These focused on a range of situations and were very powerful. One of the panel spoke about her experience of unanswered prayer and another spoke of her experience of having a disabled grandchild.

Over lunch we took the opportunity to discuss the events of the morning.

The afternoon opened with worship and then our second speaker, Rachel, gave a different take on *Psalms 46*. She spoke of how it is a comforting Psalm, how God is always with us and wants to give us fresh hope and that Jesus is worth every sacrifice. She focused on verse 10:

"Be still and know that I am God".

Although this is a well-known and often quoted verse, Rachel gave us a new perspective on it. She gave us a list of seven practical steps to follow to help us develop an intimate relationship with God:

- Stop trying to control our circumstances.
- Lay down our rights
- Stop comparing ourselves with others
- Be obedient where He has placed us
- Cultivate your secret place – this refers to that quiet place where it is just you and God
- Do not cease to pray
- Cultivate a healthy thought life.

Throughout the day there was plenty of time to pray and receive prayer ministry. All of the group who attended from St Luke's were enthusiastic about the day. These quotes give a flavour of the response:

"I didn't know what to expect. What a wonderful, inspirational and spirit-led day, amongst 200 Christian sisters. I have come away feeling so peaceful and excited for New Wine in the summer."

"*Psalm 46* 'Be still and know that I am God'. As we sang, I was prayed for and these words I was hearing for me were on the screen at the same time. At a busy time, it was wonderful to spend time praising Him and resting in His spirit. And then the last speaker gave us seven points on how to be still, number one for me being *Raphah*: let go, stop trying to be in control, God is in control. Brilliant day with lovely friends from St Luke's."

Helen J Booth



Concert at St Luke's Church



Saturday 28th February, 7:30pm

Watford Symphony Orchestra

Butterworth: *A Shropshire Lad*, Handel: *Water Music Suite No. 2*
and Elgar: *Symphony No. 2*

Tickets £18

Book in advance at ticketsource.co.uk/watford-symphony-orchestra

Also available at the door (debit/credit cards accepted)

or telephone 07925 749928

Prosecco and soft drinks will be served during the interval



Ruth Guinness

Malawi
www.sim.org
+265 984 425 575

Dear friends,

Warm greetings from Malawi! I left the UK on 2nd January having seen a sprinkling of snow on the North Downs near Guildford. I arrived in Malawi the next day to temperatures of 29°C!

Volker Glissmann and I have started a group for piloting our second Theological Education by Extension (TEE) course, *Abraham in the Story of God and His World*. The participants are from Blantyre Baptist, a large church in town, and I know most of them from piloting our previous course. I've enjoyed the first two sessions. The participants are enthusiastic, give excellent feedback and are sharing helpful insights in the group. Their enthusiasm was shown by their desire to continue meeting yesterday, a public holiday in Malawi. One even zoomed in from a work trip to Namibia!



In between the group meetings I'm busy refining the lesson that we have just trialled and editing the lesson for the next week. It's stimulating to work with such a group, and I'm enjoying it.

Meanwhile, I have met up with someone who has proofread a Chichewa translation for our first TEE course, *The Story of God and His World*. He is as keen to use it as I am, and I will meet with church leaders next week to plan a group to pilot this.

Towards the end of last year, I was asked to speak on mentoring at the Annual Church Council of the Africa Evangelical Church (AEC). In the end this did not happen due to time constraints. However, this week a *WhatsApp* group has been started for pastors from the AEC who are mentoring new interns who have just graduated from the Bible College. I'm enjoying working with these pastors and posing questions in the group.

I have also started my work with the Association of Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA), developing a format for evaluating reports, and working on a report sent in by a College seeking accreditation. I'm glad to be able to use the skills I have to do this. It can be a little challenging working remotely when feedback is needed.

The SIM Malawi team is now a little smaller than it used to be. Two families are arriving back from their home assignment this weekend. Together with the Fazakerleys next door I'm organising a games afternoon so that as many of the team as possible can come and have fun together and catch up.

Prayer points

- Give thanks for safe travel back to Malawi
- Give thanks for the start of the group piloting *Abraham in the Story of God and His World*, and pray for the continuation over the next 4 weeks
- Pray for arrangements for setting up a Chichewa group for *The Story of God and His World*
- Pray for settling into my ACTEA role and for good relationships and communication to be built up.

Thank you so much for your prayerful support.

With love in Christ,
Ruth Guinness
ruth.guinness@sim.org
Serving in Mission (SIM)
P.O. Box 136 Blantyre, Malawi



Dear Friends and Partners,

As 2026 begins, we pause with grateful hearts to thank you for walking alongside Nireekshana ACET through 2025. Your partnership was a source of strength, encouragement, and hope throughout a year which marked several important milestones. We completed our new building, obtained all required licences, and strengthened our foundation for long-term service. We launched community-based training programmes focused on preventing neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) and we took meaningful steps to empower women through skill development and livelihood opportunities.



Nireekshana runs an outpatient healthcare centre in Hyderabad to provide essential medical care to individuals and families affected by HIV/AIDS, leprosy and NTDs

Like any journey, the year was not without its difficulties. The middle months tested us, but your timely support in the latter part of the year enabled us to regain stability and continue our core medical and care services for people affected by HIV, leprosy and related complications. Because of your commitment, care did not stop, and hope continued to reach those who need it most. Every consultation, every training session, and every life touched stands as a testimony to what is possible when we work together with



Nireekshana provides patients with pharmaceutical support for HIV, leprosy and NTDs

compassion and purpose. You are an integral part of this vision, helping us bring healing, dignity and hope — one life at a time.



Nireekshana's ACET Laboratory and Research conducts clinical and research investigations, including biochemical, haematological and histological tests

As we look ahead, we do so with renewed faith and expectation. We wish you and your families a joyful, peaceful and joyful 2026. We thank you sincerely for being part of the Nireekshana ACET journey.

With warm regards and gratitude,

Nireekshana ACET

Update from the Gelsthorpe family in northern Japan

“Great and marvellous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty.”
Revelation 15:3



Handing over to the Church Elders

Praise God that Mark has had his last meeting with the church eldership before he leaves in mid-March. This will give the eldership a chance to run the church from mid-February while Mark is still in Hanamaki to support them if necessary. **Please pray** for good organisation and wisdom for them as they take over lots of responsibilities. **Please pray** for church members



The YWAM team

to grow in their faith and for many people to continue to hear the Gospel while we are away.

Youth with a Mission (YWAM) team
Praise God for the international team of 10 people from YWAM who stayed in Hanamaki for 10 days in mid January. They were able to hold a craft café and a cultural exchange event as well as delivering lots of tracts and helping with practical jobs around the church. This year, we have lots of

snow so appreciated their help with snow shovelling!

Please pray that all the people who heard the Gospel through their ministry will think carefully about Jesus and be saved.

“I believe. I’m just not a Christian yet”

Praise God for M, a lady in her early twenties who started coming to worship services recently. When the YWAM team were here, Nathan from the Philippines had a long chat with her about faith using a translation app on his phone. Her interest in Christianity comes from her time at a local Christian High School and she said that she believes but hasn’t become a Christian yet. She is also open to doing Bible study. **Please pray** that she will study the Bible and will decide to follow Jesus.

Handing over Bible studies and 1-to-1 English meetings

In order to prepare for returning to the UK, most of our church commitments will finish on 15th February. Therefore, we are planning with church members and Rachel (our missionary colleague here) how we can continue our 1-to-1 English and Bible study meetings. **Please pray** for good solutions and willing volunteers to take on these good opportunities to share the Gospel. **Please pray** that new relationships will be a blessing and not a hindrance to people’s journey to faith.

Fellowship Group and Fellowship Meetings

Outside of the Sunday service, we hold two kinds of fellowship meetings in our church. Every church member is in a fellowship group and these meet once a month after the church service for sharing and praying together. There is also a Bible study or prayer meeting every week on a Tuesday night. **Praise God** for our opportunities to study, reflect and pray together. **Please pray** for a growing desire to share and pray amongst everyone in the church. **Please pray** that we can be quick to forgive, open to share and

gracious with one another.

Our Preparations for Home Assignment

On 18th/19th March Mark will travel to the UK and Sarah will travel to India for two weeks for Caleb's school mid-term break. **Please pray** for safe travels and for us to quickly settle into



Everyone was at home in Hanamaki for Christmas

the UK. From mid-February, we will be preparing talks for Home Assignment and packing up our belongings. The house we are in at the moment will be sold soon so we will move all of our things into the church apartment temporarily. **Please pray** for efficient work and low levels of stress (this will be the first time we've had to pack up our things before Home Assignment).

Grace, Isaac and Caleb

Praise God for a good family time over Christmas and New Year and for safe travelling.

Grace is now in her second year at Southampton University studying Music with Psychology. **Please pray** for her to grow in her faith as she serves in a local church and the Christian Union and for her studies to be blessed. Isaac is studying for A-Levels in Maths and Physics which he will take in the summer (he returns to the UK in mid-February). **Please pray** for good focus for him and for helpful times with his online tutor. Caleb returned to school at Hebron (India) in mid-January and is missing home and the snow. **Please pray** for him to settle well into the new term and for help with his studies as he is still catching up on some of the first term's material.

Financial support in 2025

Thank you so much for all your generous support in 2025. **Praise God** that we were able to receive 92% of our financial needs from donors during the year. **Please pray** that God will provide all our needs in the coming year..

Thank you so much for praying for us.

With love from
Mark, Sarah, Grace, Isaac and Caleb
Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF) Japan

Watford Town Centre Chaplaincy

Notes from a meeting of Chaplains and Trustees



Eleven members of the Watford Town Centre Day Chaplains and Street Angels teams, together with guests Peter and Yvonne Wilmot from the Waterways Chaplaincy, met on Saturday 29th November.

They shared personal experiences and reflections on their calling to chaplaincy and considered 'What is a Chaplain?' One definition could be:

"A chaplain is a religious worker, ordained or lay, attached to a secular institution or organization (such as hospitals, prisons, the armed forces, schools, workplaces, or community settings) who provides spiritual care and support outside the normal life of a congregation."

One of the team spoke about God's work in restoring relationships — Jesus has experienced all that life on earth brings and therefore knows how we feel and what we are going through. He also shared of God's goodness in his marriage — from the difficult times we experience, the Holy Spirit prepares us to minister to others facing similar struggles.

Peter Wilmot shared the story of how he and Yvonne had not initially wanted to come to Watford, but how God had clearly led them there. He described how God provided a mooring for them in Croxley Marina, where they now live on a wide-beam canal boat. Through joining the Waterways Chaplaincy, they have built relationships with people living along the canal, some of whom are also New Hope service users, leading them to spend regular time at New Hope, specifically the Haven and Sanctuary. Living on a boat amongst the community has greatly helped their acceptance within the boating community.

Peter highlighted the importance of prayer before walking the towpaths, allowing God to lead rather than making your own plans. As they minister with God, rather than for God, they are learning to pray with Him — not to Him as a 'shopping list', but more like a 'love letter'.

Peter and Yvonne believe chaplains can act as catalysts for God's miracles — with the severe pressures facing the NHS this has opened opportunities

for non-confrontational prayer. God has called them to minister to those who have been overlooked and are on their own, many of whom find most churches uncomfortable. Encouragingly, there are individuals and small groups among the boaters who are exploring the Bible and following Jesus in their own way.



Street Angels in Watford High Street

The chaplains expressed particular concern for the South Oxhey skate park, and the possibility of chaplains spending time in that area.

Prayer requests included:

- WTCC Trustees
- Watford BID's plans for the coming year within the town
- Staff in the retail group *Claire's* following the announcement of the company going into administration
- the Street Angels and how their shifts might work in the future
- the hospitality industry, much of which is struggling to keep its customers.

Peter I for WTCC

20

YEARS
OF IMPACT
EMPOWERING
CHILDREN THROUGH
EDUCATION



Dear Friends and Partners,

Celebrating our 20th anniversary in 2026

Our new year's resolution is to be better at communicating with you, our wonderful supporters, sharing good news of the impact your support is having, letting you know about events coming up, and telling you more about our work, our team, etc.

This year is a big year for us as it is 20 years since our founding trustees decided to set up a charity after returning from impactful gap years in Kenya, Lesotho and Uganda. Rafiki Thabo started as an idea to support



through education some of the young people they met — little did those sponsors know that that idea would turn into a charity supporting more than 400 children and young people through education every year, and do so much more than that.

Over the past 20 years we have:

- supported 934 children and young people through education, enabling them to fulfill their life opportunities and make their dreams come true
- provided at least 163,800 school meals to students at a secondary school in rural Uganda who would otherwise have gone hungry
- helped four partner schools to improve the learning environment for many thousands of children who have attended those schools. Over the years, we have:
 - built dormitories, toilet blocks and teachers' accommodation
 - improved electricity and water supplies
 - installed solar panels
 - equipped IT and science labs
 - supported income-generation projects, such as piggeries, chicken coops and fish ponds
- reduced the barriers to education for children with disabilities, for example by:
 - providing them with assistive devices to enable them to attend school
 - providing their mothers with flexible income-generating opportunities
 - training parents of autistic children to provide their children with therapy
 - restoring a hydrotherapy pool
 - supporting specialist autism units.

We could not have done any of this without your generous support so thank you for the role you have played in making all this happen.

Team Rafiki Thabo



In January Sally Miller moved from the Friends International team in Lancaster to join the team in Birmingham. Please pray for her as she settles into her new role working with the city centre universities (primarily Aston and Birmingham City). Give thanks also that she has now found a flat in Tamworth, and pray that both the purchase, and the sale of her flat in Lancaster will go smoothly. Sally said in her last update just before Christmas: “I want to thank you for your partnership in prayer for the ministry [in Lancaster] over the past few years, and to remember that all of this work is not our own but the work of God in the hearts of international students.”

Prayer points

- Give thanks for enthusiastic initial responses from contacts in Birmingham
- Pray for trouble-free property transactions and for the move to Tamworth
- Pray for Sally as she seeks to build a team of volunteers from local churches



CREATIVE SPACE

FOR

HARD-WORKING WOMEN



COME JOIN THE FUN!

Saturday 21st February, 9:30-12 noon

Copper wire art

£8 + donation for breakfast

Saturday 21st March, 10:00-11:30am

Informal Bring & Share Craft (Free)

Saturday 18th April, 9:30am-12 noon

Flower arranging

£10 + donation for breakfast

Payment is by cash only on the day

Contact Pam to *book your place*:

text/whatsapp 07075 748243 or email pam.stlukes@gmail.com

Christmas Highlights

Carols around the Crib

Cups of tea and plates of warm mince pies were served to the congregation as they sat at tables around the crib on 14th December choosing and singing their favourite carols. It was a lovely cosy prelude to the Christmas season. Thank you to the catering team.



Holiday Club Short: Christmas Party

On 19th December 39 children enjoyed Christmas-themed games, made Christmas tree decorations and decorated gingerbread men, ate tear-and-share Christmas trees made by Mary and Marion and chocolate puddings decorated by Wendy, and learned about the true meaning of Christmas. They even had a special visitor from the North Pole who gave each of them a goody bag to take home. Thank you to the Holiday Club team.



The Nativity Service on 21st December told the tale of Dozy the Dormouse as he witnessed the momentous events of the birth of Jesus. As the children dressed in costume, a cast of characters was assembled – pictured with Mary and Joseph are an Angel, Doris the Donkey, Roxy the Ox...xy and Carl the Camel, and narrators Michael and Pam.



Wine Tasting at a Christmas Carvery

Well, what can I say? There I was, sitting at a table in the Church Hall in early December for a Saturday evening's wine tasting when along comes a lady and places a plate of roast pork with all the trimmings — roast potatoes, sprouts, peas, cauliflower, carrots, stuffing and apple sauce — in front of me. That's it in the photo.



Ideally wine should accompany food. In theory you shouldn't drink it on its own, although a lot of us do. The invitation said there would be an opportunity to taste various wines with food. But a whole plateful? Wow!

After Michael, our Vicar, had explained which wines could accompany pork, and we had tried three small glasses of these, it was time to move on. Plates were cleared away and another lady appeared with a full plate of turkey with all the trimmings, this time with cranberry sauce. We tried three more wine varieties.

By the time the third plateful arrived (duck in orange sauce along with the usual vegetables) I was wondering whether I should be looking out for some 'writing on the wall'. Happily there was none, and after trying some suitable wines, we were treated to steak and chips accompanied by some red wines. And then there was Christmas pudding and dessert wines...

As a wine tasting the evening was something more akin to a good night out at a posh restaurant. The food was beautifully cooked, service was excellent, and everyone left a tip. After expenses, £310 was donated to the Rennie Grove Peace Hospice. Quite a night!

A huge thank you to Michael and his wonderful team.

Chris Webb

If you would like to give to St Luke's by bank transfer, the details are:

Account name PCC St Luke's Watford
Sort code 20-91-79
Account no. 70687472
Reference Please state if the donation is for a specific appeal,
eg Santa's hampers, Foodbank, etc.

Please remember to complete a Gift Aid form if you are a tax payer

Santa's Hampers 2025

Once again a small team from St Luke's shopped and packed 50 Christmas hampers for families in the Watford & Three Rivers Refugee Partnership.

We were delighted to receive a letter of thanks last February from Tim Whittaker, Chair of Trustees, who said that every child of families who are in the process of gaining their leave to remain, and legal status in the UK, received gifts. Many of these families do not have recourse to public funds, and many with health issues and family responsibilities find it difficult to work.

With this in mind, we cheerfully sourced the best prices and availability for 30+ items, ranging from toiletries, tinned food items, toys, sweets, stationery, etc. We were very grateful to be able to store our shopping in a church office, ready for packing on 12th December. This meant that on packing day morning we only had to transfer everything to the upstairs lounge, lay everything out on tables and assemble the flat-pack boxes for filling later. Thank you so much to the extra volunteers who helped with this. We finished in record time and enjoyed a well-earned cup of coffee (photo above).



In the evening we returned to pack the boxes with the assistance of the young people from our youth groups, who as always do this with love, joy and enthusiasm.

Amidst the decadence of Christmas, this project always serves as an important reminder of how fortunate we are. Thank you so much for your donations to cover the cost of 50 hampers.

It has been suggested that for Christmas 2026 we could make 60 boxes, which we would gladly do, but we would need a few more team members. We will be launching this year's *Santa's Hampers* in September, and we would be so grateful if you could consider joining us.

With love from the Santa's Hampers Team



Follow the Star

Young People's Takeover Service

On Sunday 14th December, the young people of St Luke's ambushed the Vicar as he was introducing the service and led him away to return at the end of the service. Thus began the Young People's Takeover Service.



Worshipping God with energy through dance to the Church Clap

A talented band of young musicians and singers led us in praise, including a rap version of "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord" based on *Psalms 150*.

In a reversal of tradition, the adults were invited to light three Advent candles after identifying each one correctly!

Jake and Pilgrim's quiz on stars had us guessing wildly.

As we reflected on the wrong things we had done, said sorry to God and asked for forgiveness, we were given a Mentos mint. India explained that sin can be so strong like the taste of a mint that we can't get rid of it but as we say sorry to God it will dissolve away like the mint in our mouth. How

forgiveness feels was demonstrated by India in a video clip (see photo left).



India adds Mentos mints to a bottle of Coke to demonstrate that forgiveness feels like an explosion of God's love

Following the Creed which was made with Chat GPT(!), we offered each other a 'High Five' as a joyful sign of Peace.

Through the service, the younger ones read the Bible readings, and prayers were said by Cleo and Melody, each prayer ending with 3 amens which started quietly and ended loudly!

Interspersed between the readings, prayers and praise, were three short talks from the older young people.

From *Psalms 19:1-2*, Zac reminded us that creation proclaims the glory of its maker and encouraged us to worship God when we see His creation as it tells the story of our powerful and all-loving God.

Sophie, from *Matthew 2:9-10*, talked about the excitement of the wise men as they saw the star, which they had anticipated for so long, and followed it. What do we get excited about at Christmas, she asked – food, presents, family? These are all important but the most important is Jesus.



Felipe spoke about *Philippians 2:14-16*. Stars are visible because the night sky is black and we can shine like stars in a dark world, he said, when we allow Jesus to change us and turn our grumbling into gratitude, dissension into forgiveness, selfishness into kindness.

Felipe encourages us to shine like stars by practising forgiveness, kindness and generosity



At the end of the service we were each given a star decoration to hang on our Christmas tree to remind us, as children of God, to shine like stars in our daily lives (*Philippians 2:15*), and there were star biscuits made by the young people to decorate over coffee after the service.

One of the Christmas tree decorations made by Neil and Kate

Thank you to all the young people, Neil, Kate and Bekki for a lively, profound and altogether amazing morning service. Thank you too to the parents who prerecorded video clips and to the AV team who were 'kept on their toes'!

Yvonne Wilder

Badminton and Table Tennis Club

Come and join us at St Luke's Church Hall on Friday evenings, 7:30-10:30pm, for badminton and table tennis

It's for singles, couples, young people and families
(children under 11 yrs old must be accompanied by an adult)

We welcome all standards

Please speak to Fiona Craigie for more information (Tel 07759 024409)



Christingle 2025

One of our highlights in the Christmas church calendar was of course the annual Christingle service held on Christmas Eve.

Some of us arrived a few hours early to prepare 150 bags, each containing an orange with red tape around it, sweets on sticks and a candle.

It was a lovely evening where the church came together to worship God, to remember He is the light of the world and to eat sweets! We all held our Christingles and lit them singing beautiful songs in the candlelight.

There were lots of families there to enjoy the service and hot drinks and mince pies afterwards!



India T

Redemption of a Rotter!

Before the internet — in fact before most people could read and write — ordinary folk often got their information from players putting on a show.

Having a group of actors tell you a story often sticks in the mind more than the written word — even if you can read it. So although the residents of this Parish can read and write, St Luke's does put on the occasional play.

Thus it was at the morning service on 25th January. One of a series of dramas from the New Testament book of *Acts*, our St Luke's players told the tale of Saul of Tarsus — a Pharisee, persecutor of early Christians and an all-round rotter.

The action opened on stage with Saul prodding his foot into the body of Stephen, a follower of Jesus who had just been stoned to death by a group of disbelievers urged on by the Jewish Church Council. After making sure Stephen is dead, Saul sets off for Damascus and a search for more Christians to lock up or put to death

Along the way he — literally — sees the light. A flash from above makes him blind and a voice asks why he is persecuting followers of Christ. “Who are you Lord?” asks Saul.

“I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,” says the voice. “Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do.”

Before Saul could start out, there was the problem of his blindness. His companions guided him to Damascus, and in the city lived a disciple called Ananias.

In a vision, Ananias was told to visit the house where Saul was staying and lay his hands on Saul to cure Saul’s blindness. Ananias was terrified. He knew he was on Saul’s ‘hit list’ and was very unwilling to see him. But he went, laid his hands on Saul and Saul’s blindness was cured. Saul was baptised and went on to preach about the risen Christ in the local synagogue, to the amazement of the local Jewish community.

A great story, well told by the cast. Can’t wait for the next one....

Chris Webb

PS: The full story of Saul’s conversion can be read in Acts chapter 9.



Saul, to the right of the chair, played by Terry Sullivan, along with the rest of the cast, points to the cross after the performance. Actually Terry’s not a rotter at all. In real life he’s a Church Warden...

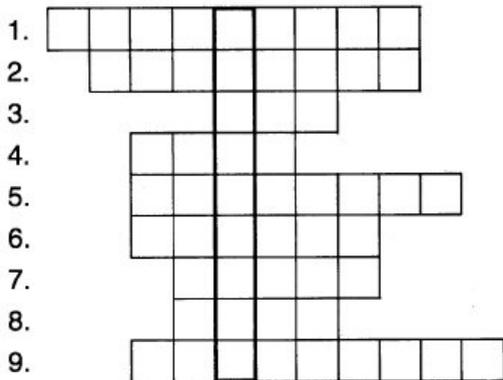
Children's Page

BEING A GOOD NEIGHBOUR

Jesus told a story to show us
how to be good neighbours.

Read it in Luke 10:30-37.

10.



1. Which city did the traveller start from?
2. What did the robbers do?
3. Was the traveller a man or a woman?
4. They hurt the man when they ---- him.
5. They also ----- him of all he had.
6. The first person to see him was a -----.
7. But he walked by on the other ----.
8. A kind neighbour helped and took ---- of him.
9. He paid the ----- to look after him.
10. That good neighbour was a foreigner. He was a -----.

St LUKE'S
WATFORD

Kids Club

Tuesdays
5.30 - 6.45 pm

Age 7-11

Subs are £2 per week
or £18 per term

TODDLERS
AT ST LUKES

Thursdays 9:30 - 11am

From Birth to Pre-School
All Welcome!

www.stlukeswatford.org/toddlers

No need to book, just come along!

For more information, scan the QR code above
or contact the church office
(email office@stlukeswatford.org or phone 01923 246161)

You are welcome to submit an article for the next edition of *St Luke's News* which should be no more than 450 words. We may edit articles for clarity. The delivery date for contributions to the next issue is Monday 20th April.

Please email articles to the Church Office: office@stlukeswatford.org

If you wish to receive *St Luke's News* regularly, either delivered to your door or emailed, please contact the Church Office (246161). Large print is also available. Alternatively, please let us know if you no longer wish to receive it.

The magazine appears on our website, www.stlukeswatford.org

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