The BRIDGE

Newspaper of the Anglican Diocese of Southwark

Christ Centred
Outward Focused

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Black History Month: Celebrating our diversity



Notting Hill Carnival-goers enjoy two days of music, dancing and parades. See page 2.

Lewisham Interfaith Peace Walk

On Sunday 8 September, members of local churches and other faith groups gathered for The Lewisham Interfaith Forum (LIF) Peace Walk.

Uniting with local faith leads and civic leaders the walk was an opportunity to celebrate diverse faith communities and walk for peace.

LIF developed out of strong partnerships and friendships between the faith communities of Lewisham.

The first ever peace walk took place in 2015. Since then, the momentum for walking together has steadily grown and the Peace Walk has become an important annual event supported by people of all faiths and none.

The Forum aims to represent all faith and belief communities in Lewisham by meeting together, promoting knowledge, understanding and mutual respect between the followers of different faiths to the mutual benefit of the community and its faith groups. It encourages partnership and collaboration with local authorities, statutory and voluntary organisations and the general public through building active and fruitful relationships.

Talking about this year's event, The Rt Revd Alastair Cutting, Bishop of Woolwich said, "This year's Walk was so well supported by members of the congregations and our civic leaders walking together. We were blessed with both sunshine and light showers on our way, reminding us how important it is to build strong relationships in the metaphorical "fair weather", so we know we can rely on each other through stormy conditions – and this last year has had too many of those – so this Peace Walk was a gift."



A view from The BRIDGE



'Only Jesus saves' – a message that stood out so boldly along the streets of Notting Hill, as two million people attended the 56th Carnival over the August bank holiday weekend.

During two days of music, dancing and parades – a tradition dedicated to Caribbean culture, it was a clear message and a reminder that as communities join together and celebrate, they also share in a joy that is welcoming, loving and accepting people of all kinds.

This month, we observe Black History Month (BHM) – a time for people of African and Caribbean decent to celebrate their rich history and advocate for social justice. It's a month recognising black culture, food, music, arts, fashion and many other contributions to society.

I remember being appointed as Black Students Officer as a teenager at college in east Surrey, during the first ever time the college celebrated black history. A display of notable black people and leaders who inspired change adorned the walls in the college refectory. My role and BHM quickly became a cause for college chatter, with people asking questions like, "Why does there need to be an officer for black students?" and "What about white history and celebrating other races?" Questions which all too often I found myself having to defend or answer.

Why is there a need to celebrate black history? Well, as we look around us – in our diverse world full of difference – we see that same difference can lead people to question and that those questions can lead us to change. Should it not be recognised?

On 5 October we'll be holding our 17th Black History Month Annual Thanksgiving Service (see pages 6–7) with the theme of 'Music at the heart of change', inspired by the scripture: *My tongue shall sing of your word, for all your commandments are righteous (Psalm 119, v172)*. This year's event aims to acknowledge the profound positive impact music has had on the black community, as well as the power of music to transform worship and enhance witness, to bring hope, and provide spaces of healing, restoration and justice. We hope that you will feel encouraged by this year's theme and the stories shared across our centrespread. Make sure you visit our diocesan website for full details.

We also look forward to welcoming The Most Revd and Rt Hon Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, who'll be visiting Southwark. Archbishop Justin plans to join us this month for a range of events in parishes of different contexts and traditions, including the BHM panel discussion that will follow the thanksgiving service. His visit will focus on prayer, deepening discipleship and growing younger, more diverse Christian communities.

Equality, diversity and inclusion is at the heart of the Southwark Vision, so throughout the month, and beyond, let us reflect on the work that has already been done. God at the centre of all we do – as we prayerfully and mindfully strive towards becoming a better world.

God has a vision for unity among all people. The Bible says: *From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth (Acts 17:26)*. We are taught to embrace diversity and recognise the contributions of all people.

Vernia Mengot

NEWS IN BRIEF

Woolwich Pilgrims travel to Rochester



On Saturday 20 July, almost 100 pilgrims from across the Woolwich Episcopal Area travelled to Rochester on a pilgrimage organised by Woolwich Racial Justice Committee.

The pilgrims, joined by Bishop Alastair, began their day with a eucharist presided at by Canon Chris Dench, followed by a talk by Canon Gordon Giles about the history of the Cathedral. Exploring the cathedral, the group saw *Draco Roffensis* (The Rochester Dragon) and then spent time in the historic town before returning for Choral Evensong to end the visit. On their next summer pilgrimage, the group plan to visit Ely Cathedral.

New faces at Southwark Cathedral

The Chapter of Southwark Cathedral is delighted to announce the appointments of Paul Smith as Chief Operating Officer and Ted Halshaw as Chief Financial Officer. Paul previously held the role of Director of Enterprise at Liverpool Cathedral, where he led the Cathedral's commercial and cultural activities, while Ted has been leading Southwark Cathedral's Finance Department since April as Interim Chief Financial Officer. A warm welcome to both of them.

Diocesan entries shortlisted in 2024 *Church Times* Green Awards

Two churches and a school have been shortlisted in this year's Green Awards.

In the category for buildings, Saint Cecilia's C of E School have been shortlisted for using green technology in its new teaching wing. This includes automatic sensors for lights, mechanical ventilation, an air-source heat pump and solar panels. They've also installed LED lights, water sensors, and an underground rainwater tank. Efforts have also been made to encourage wildlife and biodiversity.

Holy Trinity Barnes, has been shortlisted in the Congregation and Community Action category for a *Growing Together* initiative launched by parishioner Helen Hewitt, who spotted that green space was under-appreciated. Over the years, the congregation have transformed derelict land into a flourishing community garden. From growing kilos of fruit and vegetables and hosting free family gardening sessions to prioritising "no dig" gardening methods – they are taking steps to improve biodiversity and encourage parishioners to use their space more.

St Mary the Virgin, Lewisham's *Therapy Garden* has been shortlisted for the award Green Health. The garden – which sits next to a hospital's mental health unit – is a therapeutic, safe space where patients can reflect and revive. Patients can attend a weekly gardening club and tie a ribbon on the prayer tree – a way to hand over their cares to God. The garden is a sanctuary of green in the middle of the city with perennial flowerbeds, fruit trees, wildflower meadows, a pond and beehives.

There are seven categories in the Green Awards. Find out more about the shortlisted nominees at: churchtimes.co.uk/green-church

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Space limitations mean that we cannot guarantee to publish everything we receive and material may be edited. All photographs submitted for publication are assumed to have the necessary permission for printing. Please ensure that people are happy for their photographs to be submitted before you do so. Forms for permission for the use of photographs of children (Form 10) and adults who may be vulnerable (Form 11) can be found at southwark.anglican.org/safeguarding/diocesan-policies-procedures



IN FOCUS...
News from the diocese

Ella's legacy

On Sunday 8 September a memorial service for the life of Ella Roberta Adoo-Kissi-Debrah took place at St Swithun, Hither Green.



Bishop Alastair presided, the address was given by The Revd Jane Kustner, former Vicar at St Swithun's Church and the eulogy presented by Anais Daly-Gourdialsing. The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, Mayor of Lewisham, Brenda Dacres and Professor Stephen Holgate – clinical scientist and professor of immunopharmacology – were also in attendance.

The memorial service was followed by the laying of Ella's headstone at Hither Green Cemetery, attended by Ella's family (pictured).

Ella was born happy and healthy but by the age of seven she had been diagnosed with asthma and at the age of nine she suffered a fatal asthma attack. She had over 30 emergency hospital admissions between her first diagnosis of asthma and her death, just over two years later. After a landmark inquest into her death in 2013, Ella is the first person in the world to have air pollution listed as a cause of death on her death certificate.

The Ella Roberta Foundation was set up in her memory and launched at Ella's primary school on what would have been her 10th birthday. The Foundation's vision is for a world where everyone can breathe air that is free from toxic pollution, regardless of where they live, their economic status or their ethnic background.

Ella's mother, Rosamund – who is founder, director, and a trustee of the foundation – continues to campaign about the impact of air pollution to improve the lives of children with asthma in south east London.

To read more about Ella's legacy and find out about the work of the foundation visit: ellaroberta.org

Remembering Ian Keatley



On 5 August, Ian Keatley, Director of Music at Southwark Cathedral sadly passed away.

In tribute, The Very Revd Dr Mark Oakley, Dean of Southwark said, "Ian was an incredibly talented musician, and he loved his work here at the Cathedral and had many friends. Whilst an Organ Scholar here, from 2002–2004, he founded the Merbecke Choir. After then working at Westminster Abbey Choir School, the Chapel Royal in the Tower of London, and Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, he returned to Southwark five years ago. He absolutely loved choral music and was a passionate and skilled director, as well as a guide and mentor to the choristers. None of us will forget him recently conducting lots of choirs from all over the diocese for a special diocesan Evensong, filling the nave with beauty and joy. His passion for church music was infectious, and it was a true gift and blessing to our community.

"Ian was also a lover of life, a *bon vivant*, a man whose laughter filled a room, and whose hospitality was legendary. Colourful, stylish, a person of substance and reflection, he loved wine, good food, travel and his many friends. He also took his faith seriously and understood his choral direction as a vocation, translating our faith into sound. We are all the better for him and all that he gave us. We will miss him deeply."

Ian's funeral took place at St George's, Belfast, on Friday 23 August. Dean Emeritus, Andrew Nunn, preached and colleagues from the Cathedral community were attended.

A Service of Thanksgiving for Ian's life will take place at the Cathedral on St Cecilia's Day, Friday 22 November at 5.30pm. For more information, please visit the Cathedral's website.

GAIA returns to Southwark Cathedral



Luke Jerram's *Gaia* returns to Southwark Cathedral this October as part of a programme designed to inspire visitors of all ages to take positive action to protect our planet. The Cathedral's climate justice season is presented in partnership with international development agency Christian Aid.

Measuring seven metres in diameter, Gaia provides visitors with the chance to see our planet floating in three dimensions in the Cathedral's nave. The installation gives the unique opportunity to experience the 'Overview Effect' usually experienced by astronauts who report a feeling of awe for the planet and a renewed sense of responsibility for the environment.

Throughout the installation's run, guest speakers include climate justice activist Mikaela Loach, on what real climate justice looks like and Royal Society Science Book Prize winning author Gaia Vince, speaking about how we can plan and manage unavoidable climate migration while we restore our planet. Other events include a workshop led by Christian Aid on how to speak to your MP about the issues that matter most, an evening of Jazz music under Gaia with Ronnie Scott's regulars – The Leo Richardson Quartet – and a family event with astronomer Tom Kerss FRAS.

Dean Mark said, "We all make a difference by what we do – and we have to decide what kind of difference we want to make. Bringing Gaia into the space of the Cathedral, challenges us, as we look at this world's beauty, as to what we must do to protect it. We need to act so that humanity, and all the life-forms we share the globe with, can breathe and flourish together. The programme of events surrounding the installation will encourage us to be people committed to this justice for the planet and its population. The 'change' in 'Climate change' must now refer to us – the change needed in our behaviours, will-power, and ethical integrity".

Pete Moorey, Christian Aid's Head of Community & Church Fundraising & Engagement, will be preaching at the Cathedral on October 20. He said: "Christian Aid is very pleased to be working with the Cathedral on its climate justice season.

"Gaia reminds us of the wonder and beauty of God's creation, and our responsibility to raise our voices for climate justice as we seek to protect it now and for generations to come. Christian Aid works through local partners in some of the most vulnerable communities in the world, communities which have done little to contribute to the climate crisis but are paying the harshest price. We hope visitors to the Cathedral will be inspired to take action as we seek to stand with our sisters and brothers on the frontline of the climate crisis."

> *"Gaia reminds us of the wonder and beauty of God's creation, and our responsibility to raise our voices for climate justice as we seek to protect it now and for generations to come"*

The Gaia programme at Southwark Cathedral is raising funds to support the Cathedral's mission and ministry, to safeguard its heritage and to maintain and develop its outreach and education offering.

Tickets for Gaia and associated events are available at: bit.ly/3yZX5Sq

NEWS FROM OUR PARISHES

50 Faces of the Holy Land

St Alfege Greenwich hosted a photography exhibition – '50 Faces of the Holy Land' – from 13–26 August 2024.

The '50 Faces of the Holy Land' project is a photographic exhibition, curated by Friends of the Holy Land and designed to highlight the lives of the people in Israel and Palestine. Friends of the Holy Land is an ecumenical charity organisation focused on practical support for the Christian communities in the West Bank, Gaza, Israel and Jordan. The exhibition of photos by Marcin Mazur tells the stories of 50 people living in the Holy Land – Israeli and Palestinian, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Samaritan and Druze.

Previously displayed in venues such as the Houses of Parliament, cathedrals and churches of different denominations around the UK since it was created in 2017, it showcases the resilience and faith of those living in the Holy Land. The exhibition was originally commissioned by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales.

Commending the exhibition, Bishop Christopher said, "This powerful exhibition, depicts the richness and diversity of faith and culture on the faces of our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land. It helps us to move beyond the shocking images of conflict to appreciate the humanity of those who live amid the holy places.

"I am honoured to be a Patron of Friends of the Holy Land and also a member of the Holy Land Coordination, and I commend this exhibition to you as something that will deepen your appreciation of the Holy Land and deepen your prayer for all its people."

On Sunday 18 August, Bishop Michael Doe, former Bishop of Swindon, preached at St Alfege. Bishop Michael is active in supporting the Christian community in the Holy Land and working for justice and reconciliation. Following the service, there were refreshments in the hall, and Brendan Metcalfe, CEO, Friends of the Holy Land, gave a short talk about the work of the charity.

Ahead of opening the exhibition, The Revd Simon Winn, Vicar, St Alfege Church said, "We are very pleased to have the opportunity to host this exhibition, to reflect on the ongoing crises and pray for all those living in the Holy Land."

Further information at: bit.ly/4cM7mPY



A great community atmosphere

On Saturday 27 July, Holy Saviour Church in Croydon held its first parish fair since the Covid pandemic.

The Revd Tomos Reed, Vicar at the Parish of Holy Saviour said, "Once a regular and very popular event, we were delighted to be able to resurrect this great tradition. Stalls included international food, BBQ, tombola, arts and crafts, and there was even a DJ, and bouncy castle and sack races to entertain both young and old.

"The whole congregation worked together, donating time, money, and energy to make sure that the event went off successfully. We were delighted by the great community atmosphere that was created in our churchyard."



Marking a new chapter for the Parish of Croydon

The Revd Canon Dr Andrew Bishop has been appointed as the new Vicar of Croydon.



Andrew (pictured), who has served as Priest-in-Charge at Croydon Minister for nearly six years, was formally installed in his new role during a special service on Sunday 8 September.

This significant step restores the historic title of Vicar of Croydon and marks a new chapter for the parish, with a renewed focus on mission and ministry across Croydon Minster and St George, Waddon.

Andrew said, "On hearing I was going to be made Vicar of Croydon, lots of people, knowing I had been Priest-in-Charge for six years, said, 'I thought you already were!' or they said, 'So what difference does that make?' Both are good points. On one level it is a bureaucratic change in title, but it goes deeper than that. Day to day it makes little difference to me: I am still here to preach the word of God, celebrate the sacraments for the people of my parish, love them and intercede for them. For me and the parish it's a good chance to take stock, refocus our mission and further deepen existing relationships with people and institutions in and around Croydon."

Plumstead confirmations

On Sunday 1 September, 19 members of St John's Church in Plumstead made a declaration of their faith and were confirmed by Bishop Christopher. Among the confirmation candidates were seven adults and twelve young people. Confirmation classes were led by Youth Pastor Helen Beecher Bryant – in post as part of the diocese's partnership with the Diocese of London's Apprenticeship scheme. This was the first confirmation service under the incumbent, The Revd Timmy Ajayi, who has been at St John's for about two and a half years.



A 'New Day' for Bermondsey young people

Our Children and Young People (CYP) grants help to fund and support mission and ministry across our diocese.

To be eligible for funding, initiatives must be for growing or restarting mission and ministry with children, young people and families – or training that benefits the ministry of those working with these groups.

A maximum of £900 can be applied for over a calendar year.

One example of a church who recently benefited is St James, Bermondsey, who received a £300 grant to fund a trip for youth group members.

Rebecca Hilton, Voluntary Youth Leader, at St James said, "Over the summer we took members of our youth group to a Christian festival for young people called 'New Day'. Each day, there was a seminar and worship in the morning and evening.

"All of the young people felt that they had a deeper understanding of God and what it means to live as a Christian. They experienced an outpouring of The Holy Spirit and witnessed healings in the name of Jesus.

"As a group, strong relationships were formed and a real sense of fellowship has been established."

The total cost of the trip was just over £3,000 and, with the help of the grant, this money provided the young people who attended with an experience to enhance their Christian faith and grow spiritually, with hearts on fire for Jesus.

For information about CYP grants visit: bit.ly/3fYdHgc

Bermondsey Carnival

Southwark's oldest community event – Bermondsey Carnival – returned to Southwark Park on 26 August, with a selection of performances, activities and stalls.

It was a chance for local people to come together in honour of the late carnival founder, Russell Dryden, and enjoy a host of entertainment for every generation. Southwark clergy (pictured) came together as part of the Southwark Interfaith Community to promote peace, human flourishing and tackling issues of common concern.

In a post on *X* Gary Jenkins, Dean of Estates Ministry said, "Great to see Bermondsey & Rotherhithe Deanery @SouthwarkCofE flying the flag for faith at the Bermondsey Carnival #estatesministry."



To the beach!

During the summer holidays, the children and young people at St John, Peckham enjoyed a day of fellowship and fun during a trip to Southend on Sea beach, Adventure Island and Sea Pier Museum.



The Gibson Tomb

On 12 August, The Venerable Moira Astin, Archdeacon of Reigate, visited the Gibson Tomb at St Nicholas, Sutton for its annual inspection and churchyard service.

For over 200 years a service has been held each year at the church. Reader, Jeff Richards at St Nicholas writes:

James Gibson was – at different times – a sailor, distiller, wine merchant, miller, and a Master of the Worshipful Company of Ironmongers – one of the Twelve Great City Livery Companies. The tomb was built by Gibson's daughters, Mary and Elizabeth in 1777, a year after their father's death and his original burial elsewhere within this graveyard.

His daughters left money in their wills to the parish and to Christ's Hospital to pay for an annual sermon to be preached, and for the tomb to be inspected and repaired. Back then, the interest was to be spent on shoes and stockings for poorer people and children in the parish.

Since then, the money from the bequest has been pooled into the parish's common funds and the charitable distribution takes place at the Rector's discretion throughout the year. The last major repair on the tomb was carried out by Christ's Hospital in 2011.

Around 45 people joined us for the annual service and inspection of the Gibson Tomb. The official witnesses were the Mayor of Sutton, Cllr Colin Stears and the Deputy Mayor of Sutton, Cllr Louise Phelan and Archdeacon Moira who preached.

The traditional inspection intends to honour the spirit of the will, that the good news of Jesus should be preached, the church's work should be seen in public, and that the hungry are fed and the naked are clothed.

To find out more about the Gibson Tomb visit: bit.ly/4cHd0CX



Celebrating 40 years in ministry

The congregation of St Mary's Church in Lewisham joined family, friends and the wider community to celebrate 40 years since the ordination of their vicar, The Revd Steve Hall.

Steve (pictured right) was ordained at Southwark Cathedral on 1 July 1984 by Bishop Ron Bowlby. Describing himself as a "Southwark boy", Steve was baptised at St Dunstan, Cheam, where he sang as a choirboy and was confirmed by Bishop Mervyn Stockwood. He served his curacy at St Giles, Camberwell, before working in Brighton, Oxford and Southampton, finally returning to the diocese and St Mary, Lewisham in 2012. Steve will retire as vicar this month.

The celebration saw the welcome return of Bishop Michael Ipgrave (who preached) and Bishop Alastair – an old friend of St Mary's – was also in attendance.



Steve said, "It was in Southwark that my faith was nurtured and my vocation encouraged. It's been such a joy to return here for the past 12 years at St Mary's, before I look to retire in October this year. There is so much to celebrate and give thanks for – in true Southwark style!"

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Music at the heart of change

Black History Month (BHM) is a time to reflect on the history of black heritage, celebrate the contribution of black people in modern society and educate and inspire people by sharing stories about the achievements of black people who have made a profound impact all over the world.

Nationally, BHM will be 'Reclaiming Narratives' – marking a significant shift towards recognising and correcting the narratives of black history and culture.

In Southwark, we are hosting our seventeenth annual BHM Thanksgiving Service at Southwark Cathedral on Saturday 5 October, 10.30am–1.30pm.

The thanksgiving in partnership with the Southwark Diocesan Board of Education (SDBE) will be an opportunity to come together for a day of fellowship, learning and celebration, exploring this year's theme 'Music at the Heart of Change.'

music
/mju͞z͡k/
noun

1. vocal or instrumental sounds (or both) combined in such a way as to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion.

This year's event aims to acknowledge the profound positive impact music has had on the black community.

The Most Revd and Rt Hon Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury will preside and The Very Revd Andrew Zihni, Dean of Gloucester will preach.

The service will also feature music by St Saviour's and St Olave's School Gospel Choir and The Nigerian Chaplaincy in south London.

After the service, there will be a panel discussion led by The Revd Canon Roxanne Eversley, Dean of Cultural Diversity, exploring the power of music to transform worship and enhance witness, to bring hope, and provide a space of healing, restoration and justice.

Archbishop Justin will join Roxanne, alongside The Revd Andrew Mumby, Rector at St Peter, Walworth, Karen Gibson MBE, Founder and Conductor of The Kingdom Choir, Sophia Jones, Communications Consultant and Joseph Gilder, Director of Music at St Saviour's and St Olave's C of E School.

Music is a common language that we can all understand. In this edition you can meet our panelists and find out what makes their hearts sing – and how they believe music has influenced society to positively reflect the experience of black communities.

The Most Revd and Rt Hon Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury



The Most Revd and Rt Hon Justin Welby has been the Archbishop of Canterbury since 2013. He has three main priorities for his ministry – Evangelism and Witness; Prayer and the Renewal of Religious life; and Reconciliation.

Before he began training for ministry in 1989, Archbishop Justin worked in the oil industry for 11 years. He is married to Caroline and they have five children and four grandchildren.

In a video message about his upcoming visit to our diocese, Archbishop Justin said, "I am greatly looking forward to joining with all those at Southwark Cathedral to Celebrate Black History Month and our lives together."

The Revd Andrew Mumby, Rector, St Peter, Walworth



Father Andrew was born in Montego Bay, Jamaica, to Jamaican and Scottish-English parents who were teachers at Manning's School in Savanna-La-Mar, Westmoreland. He grew up in Lincolnshire before studying Music at the University of Birmingham, majoring in saxophone, orchestral and choral conducting and Beethoven's Symphonies. He trained for ordination at Westcott House after serving as a pastoral assistant in Eltham, and went on to serve as curate at St Christopher, Walworth. He has served as Rector of St Peter, Walworth since 2010 and as a member of General Synod since 2018.

Father Andrew said, "*Music at the Heart of Change* is a great theme for this years Black History Month! Many black spiritualities are fed and inspired by the music of the Church and of protest and of lament, and of course it's also true that many black musicians and Christians have inspired that music. I'm looking forward to the day, and the theme reminds me of the moment a small number of us – socially distanced during lockdown – gathered outside St Peter's Church in 2020 after the murder of George Floyd to sing *'We shall overcome'*. We sang it into a vacuum, and somehow into the world, and certainly in solidarity with others struggling for racial justice around the world and throughout time. Singing together at St Peter's is one of the greatest joys of my life and ministry: both traditional and modern songs, and also with and without the organ or piano. If I had to pick one song, it would be *'I wish I knew how it would feel to be free'* by the great musician and activist Nina Simone, a great queen of the twentieth century. The meaning of the words and the joy and drive of the music are like a hymn both calling for and envisioning the change needed for a better world."

Sophia Jones, Communications Consultant

Sophia is a communications professional with over 30 years' experience of working with international and local charities.

Sophia spent much of her childhood singing and joined her parish church choir aged five years old and later in school choirs. She was the only black child in the choir and the choir's first. Having sung

Karen Gibson MBE, Founder and Conductor of The Kingdom Choir

Karen Gibson MBE is an award-wining choir conductor and workshop leader of The Kingdom Choir.

After studying a bachelor's degree in social science, Karen initially began her career as an IT Support Officer for Wandsworth Borough Council, leading the council's IT functionality. She then made a significant career change to become a Music Teacher at the Maria Fidelis Catholic Girls Convent School. It was during her time as Music Teacher that Karen honed her skills as a Choral Conductor, conducting a series of vocal tutorials, rehearsals and music arrangements that saw the Maria Fidelis Gospel School Choir perform in front of Pope Benedict XVI during a visit to the UK at Buckingham Palace.

Her passion for gospel singing, inspired her to form her own choir – The Kingdom Choir, which she founded in 1993.

Formed of individual singers and performers from in and around London, The Kingdom Choir is a group of like-minded artists dedicated to creating a sound that demonstrates the community they share. The Choir has been performing up and down the country and all around the world for over 20 years.

Karen who is described as 'Britain's Godmother of Gospel', said, "I am excited to be able to attend the celebration of Black History at Southwark Cathedral this year, and especially thrilled to be joining the conversation on music and its power to communicate, transform and heal.

"As a woman of faith, I have been blessed to have conducted a career as a gospel music practitioner over many years and can testify to its power. Love for this genre, birthed out of the black experience, impacts people from all walks of society - those of all faiths and none, people of all races and across generations appealing to young and old alike.



"Being a music of the spirit, I believe that gospel music speaks to the heart in a way that no other music can, and that we are able to see this from its growing popularity in various areas, including mainstream music, in schools and in the community at large. It even has a growing following overseas in non-English speaking nations. With its positive themes of love, joy, peace and hope, gospel music provides the listener with uplifting vibes of inspiration which can be the anti-dote to the sadness and anxiety we often see and feel around us. For me, music really is the food of love – God's love – and I am grateful that I get to experience it, share it and be an advocate for its power."

King appoints Master of Music



His Majesty The King has appointed Ms Errollyn Wallen CBE as Master of the King's Music; the first appointment to this role of his reign.

The Master of The King's Music is an honorary appointment made by the Sovereign. The appointment is conferred on a musician of distinction who has added to the musical life of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth.

Ms Wallen (pictured right) is a Belize-born British composer, pianist and singer-songwriter, and has composed works for the BBC Proms and international events including the COP26 summit and the 2012 Paralympic Games.

Ms Wallen said: "I am thrilled to accept this royal appointment. It will be a privilege and a great honour to serve His Majesty The King, the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. I look forward to championing music and music-making for all."

Ms Wallen succeeds Dame Judith Weir DBE, who was appointed to the role in July 2014 by Queen Elizabeth II.



in a large soprano, alto, tenor and bass choir, Sophia's voice developed, so she would often sing solos. Aged 10, Sophia had an opportunity to sing in front of a professional opera singer who was going to train her.

She said, "The man said that he didn't understand me when I sang and that my lips were too thick, like Moira Stuart, and that many black people sing like that. I don't think I fully understood what he was talking about and the racism behind his words. All I wanted to do was to sing, so I continued. I didn't go back to him. I remember, however, from time to time, the look of surprise on people's faces when I would sing. They probably didn't think that a child that looked like me could sing the way I did."

In her mid-teens she began to understand the deep level and connection her singing had to her personal faith in Jesus. With new worship songs becoming popular, Sophia began to visit a new Pentecostal church planted nearby her local church.

"As soon as service was over, I would rush there and take in the lively worship and be in awe of the worship band and singers. A few of my friends went to Pentecostal churches and I used to think that they were in some way better than me because they sang cool gospel songs which I loved."

She is grateful that choral music has been the thread through her childhood and teens. Sophia appreciates classical music but loves Reggae, especially Lovers' Rock, RnB, soul music and gospel, as the genres of music she grew up around.

Sophia's adult life saw her get married, have children and live abroad for several years. Returning to the UK, she found her 'tribe' upon joining the choir at St Mary's, Lewisham.

"I loved singing in the choir at St Mary's. I had found my tribe! Even though I wasn't there very long, I had a wonderful time with warm, welcoming quirky people like me who loved singing for the Lord."

Although she later auditioned for a prestigious local choral society and got in, Sophia was diagnosed with breast cancer and took a break from singing.

Having recovered she said, "Making a joyful noise unto the Lord is what it is all about. Music and song will continue to be the bedrock of my life whether I sing in a choir again or not."

A song that resonates with Sophia is *Blessed Assurance.* She describes it as her testimony of faith in Jesus: "of how far he has brought me, of how he cares for me and will never let me go. I apply this to us as black people. We have a story and a testimony of faith and resilience which truly is our story and song."

Joseph Gilder, Director of Music at St Saviour's and St Olave's C of E School



Joseph Gilder is a musician and teacher who has been Director of Music at St Saviour's and St Olave's Church of England School since 2016. Based in Elephant and Castle, the diverse inner-city school is one of the cathedral schools that regularly worship at Southwark Cathedral. At St Saviour's and St Olave's, music is seen as a universal language that should be accessible to all students. The curriculum emphasises performing, composing, listening, and appraising skills – key components of a well-rounded musical education. The school is also committed to becoming an anti-racist institution, fostering a culture of equality and inclusion.

Joseph grew up in rural Essex, where he received a rich musical education, learning piano in school and singing in the choir at St John the Baptist, Our Lady, and St Laurence in Thaxted, where he also studied the organ. He went on to study music at the University of Bristol, completing his PGCE in 2010. Joseph believes strongly in community music-making and works to create an inclusive environment at St Saviour's and St Olave's where every student has the opportunity to engage with music, express themselves, and feel valued.

As a music teacher, Joseph is particularly inspired by Béla Bartók's *Mikrokosmos*, a collection of progressive piano pieces designed to introduce students to complex musical concepts in an accessible way. This work aligns with his teaching philosophy, demonstrating that even the most intricate aspects of music can be made approachable for learners of all levels.

Black History Service

Thanksgiving eucharist 10.30am–1.30pm, Saturday 5 October at Southwark Cathedral. Free. Details: southwark.anglican.org/bhm

BHM resources

National Church resources for use during BHM are on the Church of England website at: bit.ly/3XDEZiO



DISCIPLESHIP & MINISTRY
Advent

’Tis the season to get ready…

The first Sunday of Advent is fast approaching and in your parish, you may already be thinking about how to celebrate the coming of Christ. Advent is a time for waiting and preparation for a moment of great celebration – Christmas. How will your church be getting ready?

Tim Hill, Reader and Youth and Children’s Pastor at Horley Team Ministry shares some of his top tips for engaging with schools, children and young people before Christmas and gives an example of how *Sparkfish* – a local Christian Charity – tells the Christmas story. Tim writes:

‘Oh! I wish it could be Christmas Everyday’, so sang glam rock band – Wizzard and we’ve all sung along at some point, haven’t we?

In our parishes we should certainly be thinking about our Christmas celebrations by now. At Christmas, more people come to church than at any other time, so it is considered a prime outreach season for mission and worship with those who do not regularly visit church.

Schools are open to church input all year, so at Christmas why not invite them to come and visit? You could have a school carol service in the day and repeat it in the evening for adults to come and see it, too. Work closely with the school on the content of your service, so that you can tell the story about the coming of our Saviour. You may also want to prepare a Christingle service or Nativity.

To get these events in the diary, advance notice is crucial, as lots of other school events will already have been planned, so it is a chance for schools to plan their diary around Christmas activities.

Many churches put on special displays for Christmas. This is your opportunity invite schools and ask schoolchildren to come and sing. Get your church community, choir and bellringers involved.

In the Redhill, Reigate and Horley, we partner with Christian Charity, *Sparkfish* – a local and collaborative, Christian organisation – that aims to inspire and encourage young people in faith, hope and love.



At Christmas the *Sparkfish* team and volunteers organise an event called ‘A Christmas Journey’ for Year 2 pupils. This is an opportunity for classes of 30 children and supporting adults to come into church where we set up a series of gazebos or tents – each decorated to represent a scene in the original Christmas story.

In each one, the children can listen to a storyteller who narrates the Christmas story – painting a picture of history by using soft slow delivery, different displays and tiny objects.

First, the children are invited to walk to ‘Mary’s kitchen’ where she (a local volunteer or *Sparkfish* team member) is kneading dough. They watch and listen. Suddenly, Mary is interrupted by trumpets, when Angel Gabriel appears and announces the birth of Jesus. Next the children visit the stable, and using puppets, they can watch the animals taking about the birth. Then the children journey to see the shepherds, but instead see an empty tent, with a hilly backdrop – the shepherds are no longer there. They go to see the wise men, but they are also no longer there! Over the pungent smell of frankincense and a tent draped in fine silk, the children reach the end of their mystical journey and are asked to tell the storyteller what they have seen along their way.

It’s beautiful, almost magical!

As you plan for Christmas with children and young people in your area, know that God is with you as you prepare to share his message.

Share a Christmas photo from your church

We’re looking for ‘Christmassy’ pictures to feature on this year’s diocesan Christmas cards.

If you would like to send us your photos, please provide high-quality, original large images, a caption and (if it is a professional photograph) let us know who to credit.

Please also ensure that you have consent to use the image – particularly making sure that no children or vulnerable adults are pictured.

Send your photographs by 8 November to: bridge@southwark.anglican.org







IN FOCUS...

Lament to Action

Under the "gathering tent"

Last month, saw the first gathering for UK Minority Ethnic (UKME) and Global Majority Heritage (GMH) clergy in the province of Canterbury. The event, Seeking Justice and Joy, Celebrating Calling and Courage, was part of a series of annual gatherings recommended by the Archbishops' 2024 report on racial justice, *From Lament to Action*.

Held on Wednesday 4 September at Church House, the gathering was co-led by The Revd Canon Dr Anderson Jeremiah, Bishop of Edmonton and The Rt Revd Dr Rosemarie Mallett, Bishop of Croydon.

From Lament to Action set out 47 specific actions for different parts of the Church of England to implement across five priority areas. One such recommendation was the inception of provincial gatherings of UKME/GMH clergy. The first took place in May, at Bishopthorpe Palace for clergy in the CofE's northern province.

The Southern gathering included table discussions, networking and a series of reflections on diversity. The Rt Rev Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani, Bishop of Chelmsford spoke about Persian/Farsi Christianity, Bishop Jeremiah spoke about ministry with Dalits and Bishop Rosemarie on African Chattel Enslavement. These reflections encouraged conversations and provided a space for attendees to share their experiences and perspectives on racial justice and inclusivity within the Church. There were over 100 clergy and ordinands present.

In her remarks to the gathering, Bishop Rosemarie praised the introduction of the terms UKME and GMH in the CofE, saying that, "Expanding the terminology has meant that many more people feel that they can come under the gathering tent, and feel that they too are part of the conversation …and that they belong". Although often yoked together, the terms refer to different identities: GMH describes people who come from countries where their ethnicity is in the majority, whereas UKME describes British people who, in the context of the UK, find their ethnicity minoritised.

> *"Expanding the terminology has meant that many more people feel that they can come under the gathering tent, and feel that they too are part of the conversation… and that they belong."*





Attendees at the Global Majority Heritage gathering.

Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby also joined to deliver a formal greeting. Emphasising the CofE's need to reflect the diversity of the country, Archbishop Justin said, "We must be a church where everyone feels supported to achieve their full potential, where people can see themselves reflected at every level of our institution, and that is younger and more diverse."

The Provincial GMH/UKME gathering represents a step forward in the Church's ongoing commitment to justice, diversity, and inclusion. At the end of the gathering, people were asked to give one or two words to sum up their experience of the day. Key phrases that came up again and again were 'safety', 'understanding', 'being valued' and 'being listened to'. All asked for this to be an annual event.

The day continued with a walk to St Margaret's Church for a eucharistic service, where Archbishop Justin presided and The Rt Revd Lusa Nsenga-Ngoy, Bishop of Willesden preached.

A reception followed to conclude the day at Lambeth Palace – remarks were shared by the Archbishop, Bishops, and other participants and a vote of thanks was offered by Sharon Prentis, the CofE's Deputy Director of the Racial Justice Unit.

Find out more

For more information about *Lament to Action* visit: bit.ly/3XDfu0Q

Standing against racism in all its forms

Our anti-racism charter

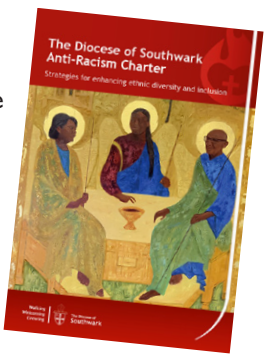
The Diocese of Southwark's Anti-Racism Charter (ARC) was approved by Diocesan Synod on 13 March 2021. The ARC is part of a strategy to enhance diversity and inclusion across Southwark Diocese.

The key principles of the Charter are:

- an explicit theological understanding that God's kingdom is multi-ethnic, and that it is through our baptismal covenant that we recognise and respect the dignity of every human being and our unity in Christ
- an intentional focus in our theological studies, liturgy, teaching, prayer, word and work to take strategic and practical actions to combat racism and inequality
- a clear strategy for increasing and sustaining diversity in our governance structures at Diocesan and parish level so as to ensure representation and participation of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds at all levels of our organisation

As well as its three key principles, the ARC includes six diocesan commitments and a 12-point action plan for leadership and development.

We encourage you to continue to implement the charter in your parishes and you can download the ARC here: bit.ly/4eipodL



Over the past year, we have been developing (and have now piloted) an ARC study guide to use within your parishes to further support the key principles of the ARC. We look forward to updating you on the feedback we have already received from parishes who have been using the guide, as we journey in faith and hope for the future.

New appointments

As part of our Southwark Vision 2017-2025 and strategic objectives to grow leadership and representation that reflects the rich diversity of God's people, Bishop Christopher appointed The Revd Canon Roxanne Eversley as Dean of Cultural Diversity and Canon Librarian. This role embodies our commitment to building a Church for all which reflects its diverse community and seeks to transform unjust structures of society. Roxanne provides a strategic focus to supporting our rich cultural diversity and works closely with the Vocations Team. Additionally, we are seeking to grow our work on urban estates to encourage leadership opportunities in our worshipping communities.

Recruitment for a Racial Justice Development Lead to work under the guidance of the Bishop's Lead for Social and Racial Justice and the Diocesan Secretary is underway to promote and continue to implement ARC. The role will focus on promotion, engagement, training, resources, research and data monitoring, while addressing the needs of our wider diocese and parishes.

We have also recently appointed a Racial Justice Training and Resources Officer, Reg Amoah, a role that will be key in supporting parishes on their racial justice journey and rolling out training across our diocese. Both roles are funded by the Racial Justice Unit of the National Church.

Resources

In July 2024, the Church of England published *Progress on Racial Justice across the Church of England dioceses* – a report which examined the progress by dioceses in implementing the recommendations of *From Lament to Action*, by the Archbishops' Anti-Racism Taskforce. bit.ly/47qK2Gk

Read how Southwark responded to the recommendations at: bit.ly/4elckEx



IN FOCUS...

Southwark Vision

Our values: joy

In our series unpacking the values of the Southwark Vision, The Revd Betsy Blatchley writes...

"I have said these things so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." (John 15:11)

These words of Jesus come in the context of his discourse on 'abiding in God' which includes the potentially painful process of 'pruning' that God undertakes for his followers. It is also part of Jesus' preparation of his closest friends for the horror of the coming crucifixion. All this suggests that true God-inspired joy is far from a superficial happiness and an "Isn't everything wonderful." type of faith.

Thinking about joy as one of our core values in Southwark Diocese can feel challenging. As we look at so much suffering across our world and in our communities and, indeed, in our own churches, it feels almost frivolous to think about being joyful. But how often do we find that the most joyful people we encounter are those who seem to have the least reason to be happy in human terms? Jesus is clear in this passage that the source of true and complete joy is not dependent on our circumstances, but from being fully connected to, and drawing on all that we need from, God - as branches must be connected to the vine to thrive and bear joyful fruit.

In our Arts Ministry in Nine Elms, joy features a lot as a topic of discussion and, I hope, as an outpouring from our work. Indeed, in the summer term this year it was a key theme running through much of our creative health and wellbeing programme. We were literally 'dancing for joy' in our Creative Soul Dance project – a programme that enables those who have never danced a step to embrace the God-given gift of movement to nurture wellbeing. One of our Creative Soul Cafés featured the creation of beautiful fabric 'Journals of Joy' and this gave us the opportunity to talk to participants about what real joy meant to them, something many had never really thought about.

Southwark Diocese's former Bishop for the Arts, The Rt Revd Rob Gillion often talked to our creative prayer community about being 'joy-bringers' or 'joy-carriers' – I love this idea. As people made in the image of God – the great creator and creative – we are not called to be superficially happy, but to carry and share deep joy amidst the challenges and struggles of life. I believe that nurturing and celebrating creativity has a crucial role in reflecting this joy of God to the world. A powerful piece of music, a stunning



Image: © Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, Ceri Richards *The Supper at Emmaus*, MMAC.

painting or sculpture, a beautiful dance performance. All these have the power to evoke a sense of awe and wonder – something sorely lacking in many aspects of our contemporary life – which in turns gives a glimpse of the deep joy that God longs to fill us with.

I believe that a commitment to nurturing arts and creativity as a central part of our worship and mission is hugely important in helping our churches and ministries to offer these glimpses of, and encounters with, the deep joy of relationship with God. It's a great gift we can offer to our communities, and I hope that we will all seek to find and nurture artists and creatives in our midst to help us all to be God-inspired 'joy-bringers' in our own communities..

Betsy Blatchley is Pioneer Minister in the Arts in Nine Elms for the Diocese of Southwark.

Details of *Southwark Vision* and the core document can be downloaded at: southwark.anglican.org/southwark-vision



LET US PRAY...

OCTOBER

The Venerable John Kiddle

Archdeacon of Wandsworth

St Luke

The feast of St Luke is celebrated on 18 October. Having been the Vicar of St Luke's Church in Watford for nearly 17 years I am, I guess, a little biased but I'm often drawn back to Luke, his gospel and the book of Acts.

In religious art and iconography, St Luke is traditionally depicted as an artist, often painting an image of the Virgin Mary. We see Luke as an artist in his writing, too; painting for us a picture of Jesus and the lives of his first followers. Five 'colours' stand out:

The Gospel. Luke is an artist of the word, and the story he tells is good news. Its pages are flooded with the rich colour of God's love unveiled for us in the words and life of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit. From beginning to end, the bright thread of the life-giving and life-changing spirit of God weaves creatively through the story Luke tells. That same spirit threads through our lives and weaves the life of the world.

Inclusion. When you take time to look at the picture Luke paints you begin to see, everywhere, another colour – the strong warmth of inclusion. Luke shows us Jesus' consistent tendency to attend



to all, to notice all, to love all - not least those that others excluded.

Healing. St Luke, 'the beloved physician', paints with a palette that is both calm and radically transforming. God's Kingdom, which we seek in the world and through our prayers, is liberation and healing. It is justice and joy. It turns the world upside down and brings peace to troubled lives.

Mission. Luke paints a picture that does not allow us to look with blinkered vision. The more we see, the more his colours speak to our hearts and turn our hearts, the more we find ourselves looking away from ourselves. Luke invites us to journey with him into God's world, to see all that God is doing, in its own colourful vibrancy, and to join in.

How might your life, and the life of the Church we serve together, reflect more deeply and truly the colours on Luke's palette?

What picture is the Spirit painting in and through you?

God of beauty
You paint this world in love
Teach us with Luke
To be artists of
your multi-coloured grace
That our lives and our words
May speak eloquently and generously
Of the good news of your healing, life changing, all embracing love.
For Jesus sake
Amen.

WHAT'S ON



Please send details of your next events for NOVEMBER ONWARDS to Trinity House **BY MONDAY 7 OCTOBER**

October

SATURDAY 5 OCTOBER

✱ **SOUTHWARK CATHEDRAL** – Black History Month thanksgiving eucharist. Join us for a day of fellowship, learning and celebration, exploring this year's theme *'Music at the heart of change'*. In partnership with the Diocesan Board of Education. 10.30am–1.30pm. Free. Details: southwark.anglican.org/bhm

SATURDAY 5 OCTOBER

♫ **KINGSTON** – 'Come and Sing': Messiah: G F Handel. We are offering you the chance to sing this masterpiece in the beautiful surroundings of All Saints Church, Kingston, The Market Place KT1 1JP. Conducted by David Condry, Director of Music at All Saints. Registration 2pm, rehearsal 2.30–5.30pm, performance 7pm. Info: allsaintskingston.co.uk, tickets £20, £5 loan of score, from: bit.ly/3WHTvFv

MONDAYS 7–28 OCTOBER

✱ **BEDDINGTON** – St Mary's, Beddington, celebrates Black History Month with film and food nights, each Monday in October. 6.30pm at Church Road, Wallington SM6 7NJ. 7 – I Am Not Your Negro. 14 – The Queen of Katwe. 21– I Am Everything. 28 – The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind. Free.

SATURDAY 19 OCTOBER

✱ **REIGATE** – Southwark Against Modern Slavery event: What's the price of modern slavery? 10am–3pm at Reigate Methodist Church, 53 High Street, Reigate RH2 9AE. Free.

♫ Croydon Minster

40 minutes of music – lunchtime recitals, Fridays 1.10pm

11 Oct Kailing Zhang, piano
18 Oct Iridescence Ensemble
25 Oct Huan Zhang, Piano

Free but donations gratefully received. Details: croydonminster.org

24 OCTOBER – 2 NOVEMBER

✱ **BLACKHEATH** – Art gallery exhibition in the beautiful church building of St Michael & All Angels, Blackheath Park, SE3 9JL. Local art gallery, exhibiting with musical opening evenings. All net proceeds go to local charities and foodbanks. Free. Details: se3.org.uk/smag

November

SATURDAY 9 NOVEMBER

✱ **WATERLOO** – Southwark Diocese Children, youth & families ministry conference. Growing Younger Together: how small changes create big impact. 10am–3:30pm at St John's Church, 73 Waterloo Road, London SE1 8TY. Tickets £15 per person (includes lunch). £10 per person for groups of four or more from the same parish. Details and booking at: bit.ly/3AZV8Go

SATURDAY 9 NOVEMBER

♫ **LEWISHAM** – Lewisham Choral Society presents Handel's Messiah. 7.30pm at Great Hall, Goldsmiths College, Lewisham Way, London SE14 6PP. Tickets £2-£18 from bit.ly/3MFaliv



Share your stories

The Bridge is your newspaper

Each edition is packed full of stories and features from across the diocese, which we hope you enjoy and will be encouraged by. Please feel free to share this newspaper with your friends, family and wider community. You can re-use individual stories for your parish magazines, newsletters and pew sheets (crediting *The Bridge*).

Printed copies are distributed direct to each parish and an online version can be read or download at: southwark.anglican.org/thebridge

Thank you to all who shared stories – do keep them coming! Send your stories, hires photos and listings to Vernia at: bridge@southwark.anglican.org.

To advertise in *The Bridge* please email Joseph: Joseph.Callanan@southwark.anglican.org



WEDNESDAY 13 NOVEMBER

✱ **SOUTHWARK** – Leading worship with the Book of Common Prayer. A practical workshop to show you how to use this life-giving prayer book to lead worship in your own church. Open to all those who lead worship in parishes, schools and chaplaincies. 6.30–8.30pm at Trinity House, 4 Chapel Court, Borough High Street, London SE1 1HW. Free. To book email learning@southwark.anglican.org

SATURDAY 16 NOVEMBER

♫ **CROYDON** – St Mildred's Church, Croydon, presents the inaugural concert featuring the world-renowned organist of Notre-Dame, Olivier Latry. 7.30–9.30pm at St Mildred's Church, 30 Bingham Road, CR0 7EB. Tickets: £7.50–£50 from: bit.ly/4bumvoH

December

SATURDAY 7 DECEMBER

✱ **WIMBLEDON** – *The Hill Singers* Chamber Choir begin their 2024/25 season with a concert at St Matthew's Church, Durham Road, SW20 0DE. Featuring Charpentier's 'Messe de Minuit', with carols for choir and audience. Tickets on the door £14; £12 concessions, cash only, children under 16 free. Details: hillsingers.co.uk

SATURDAY 7 DECEMBER

✱ **WEST WICKHAM** – St Francis of Assisi will be holding its 11th Annual Big Christmas Sing. Join for carols sung by the West Wickham Choir and choirs from local primary schools; and hear Christmas readings. All welcome. 4pm at St Francis of Assisi, Ravenswood Avenue BR4 0PA.

This newspaper is printed with premier paper and the diocese is part of the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) and a Carbon Capture customer. This means that we are part of the Woodland Trust's Woodland Carbon scheme, a scheme that aims to mitigate the CO2 emissions generated by the production, storage and distribution of the paper purchased. For every pack of the paper sold, 5p of the wholesale price goes directly to the Trust. Of this, 2p goes towards Woodland Carbon and 3p to their other work, such as the protection and restoration of ancient woodland.

Email your upcoming events to bridge@southwark.anglican.org

JESUS LOOKED AT HIM AND LOVED HIM
MARK 10:21
AND HE LOOKS AT YOU AND LOVES YOU TOO

IN FOCUS...
Prisons Week

Jesus looked at him and loved him. And he looks at you and loves you too.

Sunday 13 October marks the beginning of Prisons Week 2024 (13–19 October). Wendy Stephens, Prison Chaplain writes:

A week when the Christian community, through individuals and churches are encouraged to pray for prisoners and their families, the victims of crime and their communities, those working or volunteering in the criminal justice system – including prison chaplaincies and the many organisations who are involved in caring for those affected by crime both inside and outside of our prisons.

'Jesus looked at him and loved him. And he looks at you and loves you too.' These words from Mark 10.21 are the focus for this year's week of prayer. For many leaving prison, the hardest thing is to move on, to change their lives around and to be given a chance and accepted back into the community. As prison chaplains we have a duty to help ensure people leaving prison have the support they need to make this change; to signpost to charities working in this diocese who work with and support ex-offenders such as The *Nehemiah Project* and *Change for Good*. I'm delighted that we are profiling the work of both charities in this edition of *The Bridge*.

I would also like to encourage churches to consider signing up to the *Welcome Directory*, a list of faith communities who have signed up to provide places of welcome for people leaving prison. Many find faith in prison and having somewhere to go where they feel safe and supported when leaving prison, may make the difference from re-offending or going straight. To find out more about the Welcome Directory and to register go to: bit.ly/3XBoKTl

During Prisons Week, please pray for the five prisons in this diocese and the two others which fall just within the Guildford diocese, in Banstead. Please think about how you, as individuals and churches, can help the people for whom you are praying. For more information and resources to download go to prisonsweek.org. Copies of the Prisons Week prayer leaflet can be obtained through the 'contact us' link on the website or by emailing info@prisonsweek.org and providing your name, address and quantity required. Look out, too, for the daily prayer for Prisons Week on the diocesan website.



***Change for Good* is a resettlement charity in born out of the chaplaincy department of HMP Wandsworth.**

Prisons Week prayer

Lord, you offer freedom to all people.
We pray for those in prison.
Break the bonds of fear and isolation that exist.
Support with your love prisoners and their families and friends, prison staff and all who care.
Heal those who have been wounded by the actions of others, especially the victims of crime.
Help us to forgive one another, to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly together with Christ in his strength and in his Spirit, now and every day.
Amen

Justice and Belonging

Change for Good is a resettlement charity in London that was born out of the chaplaincy department of HMP Wandsworth in 2012. Its mission is to empower those leaving prison and resettling in London to transform their lives through mentoring, advocacy, and peer support. Many people's journey with Change for Good starts on the prison wings as they help prepare prisoners for release. Once released, volunteers provide one-on-one mentoring across London and peer support through Next Chapter to focus on life skills, community, and access to services.

Read a blog 'Justice and belonging' by Josh Brettell, CEO, *Change for Good* as he shares the story of Kieran – now an ambassador – who has found belonging through the community and *Next Chapter* after a prison sentence saw him lose hope.

Read more at: https://bit.ly/3L2aJH6

Faith, recovery, and a new beginning: my path with *The Nehemiah Project*

The Nehemiah Project is an independent charity working as a residential drug and alcohol recovery service for adult men, with five houses in South London.



The project offers a home and support for men with a history of addiction to transform their lives. In this edition, Mark (pictured) tells his story about his life-changing transformation. **Mark writes:**

Sitting in my prison cell at HMP Brixton, I would often hear someone shout, "CofE service," calling people to the chapel on Sundays. I had heard this call to church many times but had never taken notice – until one day when I felt led to go to the service.

The experience I had inside was transformational, I no longer felt like I was in prison. The message that I was "lost but not forgotten" resonated deeply with me, finally I felt free and at peace.

From that day on, I attended every Sunday and even joined the choir. As I got clean from drugs, I read the Bible, the only book I'd ever fully read. It transformed my mind, teaching me about love, kindness, and honesty.

At this point I was in my thirties and had spent most of my adult life in addiction.

My struggles began in childhood when learning difficulties caused me to disengage at school. I was bullied, lacked support, and left school at 15 without any qualifications. My life spiralled from there – cannabis, ecstasy, alcohol, and eventually, more severe addiction. While my parents were loving, I caused them a lot of heartache with reckless behaviour, including once accidentally setting our house on fire. After school, I got jobs by lying on applications, but I was unmotivated and unstable. Addiction overtook my life, and by 2009, I had stopped working and turned to drug-related crime, leading to multiple prison sentences.

But everything changed when I got clean in prison – my first major achievement. During a service I found a flyer for *The Nehemiah Project* and in April 2019, when I left prison, I joined *Nehemiah*. The first two weeks were difficult and I wasn't sure I could complete the recovery program. It was scary. However, with the support of the staff and fellow residents, I completed the three-month stage one program and moved into stage two accommodation. I started to engage again with my family and found the person I was before drugs took over.

Through *Nehemiah*, I reconnected with my life, found new friends at church, and eventually chose to give my life to Christ. I even met a woman, and we started going to church and outreach together. I hadn't been in a relationship for over 20 years. On 25 July 2020, we were married.

Nehemiah taught me the importance of responsibility, surrounding myself with the right people, and asking for help when I needed it. After everything I had my parents go through, they stuck by me, and I realised I needed to stay clean not just for them, but for myself.

Five years on, I now work part-time for *The Nehemiah Project* as a Lived Experience Practitioner, supporting new men as they join the charity, particularly at evenings and weekends. I also work for *The Forward Trust*, training peer mentors to support men like me.

My life has come full circle – transformed by God and ***The Nehemiah Project****.*

Find out more

For more information, and to find out how you can support *The Nehemiah Project*, visit tnp.org.uk