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The magazine for the Diocese of Newcastle

Extra

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Full story plus more pictures: **Pages 4&5**



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 **THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND**
DIOCESE OF NEWCASTLE

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A message from Bishop Mark



**The Rt Revd Mark Wroe,
Bishop of Berwick**

'We have more sky'

For a long time, two large trees have dominated our back garden, a sycamore and a beech. Unfortunately, it was recently discovered that the beech was diseased and at risk of falling over. A few weeks ago, a team of tree surgeons carefully and skilfully took down the beech tree and reshaped the remaining sycamore. After the work, looking into the garden one of my children observed: 'We have more sky now!'

I have reflected on that observation as we journey towards the season of Advent. Advent is traditionally a season of preparation, often limited to our practical preparations for our usual Christmas traditions, gatherings, and celebrations. Yet our Scriptures in this season consistently invite us to broaden our horizons and lift our gaze from street level and look to Christ's return: 'we have more sky!'

Like part of the Northumberland skyline now sadly without our famous Sycamore Gap, the landscape in our garden looks very different now. As we look out the window we see differently and further; we have a new view and perspective on our surroundings. It was a change in landscape and view that the prophets looked forward to, and which the arrival of John the Baptist echoed and heralded as Matthew's Gospel proclaims:

"Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth..."

Serious earthworks are being proposed here. But this change of landscape doesn't just mean we see wider and further. It's all about making it easier for God to come to his people: level out the peaks and troughs, straighten up the twists and turns – such is the urgency and longing of God to be among us every

obstacle preventing his arrival that must be removed.

We are moving into a time of year which invites us afresh to see differently and to allow our perspectives to be changed. That might be about having obstacles removed: having our fears calmed, our wrong attitudes forgiven, our faith encouraged, and our witness renewed in the light of Jesus Christ. It might also be about having our perspectives reshaped by the Holy Spirit so that we can 'see more sky'.

As a diocese we are about turning outwards with the good news of Christ: seeking, sharing, and sending. As we seek God, part of our greater horizon is also remembering that God is always seeking us first: seeking us, passionately and urgently – clearing everything out of the way to be with us in his Son Jesus Christ. My hope and prayer in this season is that we discover a greater view, a wider horizon and that 'we have more sky' as God comes to meet us in Christ.

The Rt Revd Mark Wroe

Bishop Helen-Ann enters The House of Lords



Bishop Helen-Ann with The Rt Revd Graham Usher, the Bishop of Norwich and former Rector of Hexham.

The Bishop of Newcastle has taken her seat in the House of Lords and in so doing has become one of the 26 Lords Spiritual and a Lord of Parliament.

Bishop Helen-Ann was supported in her introduction by the Bishops of London and Derby. She presented her Writ of Summons from the Crown and swore a parliamentary Oath of Allegiance.

Attending the ceremony and watching from the

Gallery were family and friends. They were joined by two students and a teacher from Duke's Academy in Ashington, by John McCabe, the Chief Executive Officer of North East Chamber of Commerce and members of the Bishop's staff team.

She is very much looking forward to using the privilege of this seat for the good of the Diocese and the many communities it covers: its people, places and issues.

Bishop Helen-Ann reflected: "I am looking for-

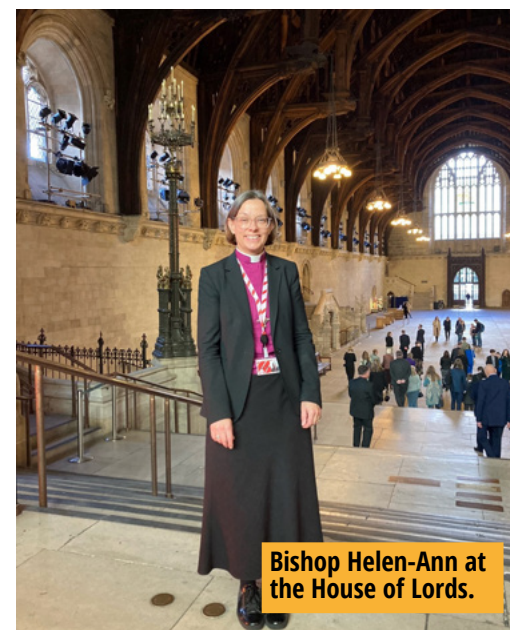


Bishop Helen-Ann and husband Myles with Diocesan representatives at the House of Lords.



ward to this new aspect of my role as Bishop of Newcastle. Becoming a Lords Spiritual will, I hope and pray, enable me to speak further into the public square about the issues of vital importance to our varied region and to meet with and collaborate with other members of the House in our collective role of scrutiny and challenge.

"I am very aware of the different views about bishops in the Lords, who in fact make up only three percent of its total membership. I will take my time to discern carefully what issues I might



Bishop Helen-Ann at the House of Lords.

seek to amplify and engage in, and also try hard not to get lost in the many identical corridors of the Palace of Westminster!

"I am very grateful indeed for the continued support and prayers of so many people in this new season."

On 14 November, Bishop Helen-Ann made her maiden speech in the House of Lords. You can read it and watch the video [here](#).

Lay ministry: new readers licensed at Newcastle Cathedral



The readers' licensing service at Newcastle Cathedral.

New readers in the Diocese were licensed during a service of celebration at Newcastle Cathedral on Saturday 28th October.

Bishop Helen-Ann presided over the service, which was a memorable day for four new readers, and a fifth who has joined from another part of the country.

It saw Christine Stevenson licensed to the Benefice of Warkworth, Acklington and Shilbottle; Ann Laing licensed to the Benefice of Tynemouth Cullercoats St. Paul; Sharon Williams licensed to the Parish of Morpeth; and Margaret Evans licensed to the Parish of St. Mary's, Monkseaton.

Sarah Howard has transferred her licence

to St. Michael's, Alnwick; after moving from the Diocese of Peterborough.

Dr Ce Pacitti, Continuing Ministerial Formation Officer in Newcastle Diocese said the day, which started with an AGM and included lunch, was attended by over 40 readers.

She thanked all of the readers for their dedicated work and commitment and also expressed gratitude to Bishop Mark, Bishop Helen-Ann, recently-appointed Diocesan Director of Ordinands and Vocations the Revd Stephen Tranter, the Revd Dr David Bryan and Dr Melody Briggs from Lindisfarne College of Theology, and Bishop Stephen Platten for his work as interim Warden of Readers.



New Director of Mission and Ministry for Newcastle Diocese

The Bishop of Newcastle is pleased to announce that the Reverend Dr Richard Whaite is to be our next Director of Mission and Ministry.

Ric, who is currently Rector of St Mary Without-the-Walls in Chester, will take up his new role in March and as a member of Bishop Helen-Ann's senior leadership team, Ric will hold a lead responsibility for developing and overseeing the discipleship and ministry strategy for the Diocese, including the training and equipping of lay and ordained leaders. He will also encourage and enable mission and practical evangelism in the parishes and deaneries, and support them in the Diocesan vision 'Seeking, Sharing, Sending'.

Commenting on his appointment, Ric said: "It is a privilege to be invited to serve alongside the people of this diocese as we begin to explore 'Seeking, Sharing, Sending' in the context of the nearly 150 years of the faithful witness of this Diocese to God's abiding love. I hope together we find deep joy in discerning the many gifts God offers to each of us in our journeys, as well as wisdom and humility in sharing those gifts with all whom we encounter."

Welcoming the news, Bishop Helen-Ann said: "Ric brings to our diocese a wealth of experience and wisdom from his time in Chester, as well as great enthusiasm, and I am grateful that he has chosen to join us during this exciting time for our Diocese as we seek to turn outwards in mission and become younger and more diverse. I very much look forward to working with Ric as we develop our strategies and training for mission and ministry."

In addition to his parish role in Chester, Ric also currently serves on the Diocesan Committee for Ministry in Chester (as Assistant Diocesan Director of Vocations) and on the



The Reverend Dr Richard Whaite

Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches. During his time in Chester, Ric has taught modern doctrine and historical theology in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Chester, as well as on diocesan lay and ordained ministry training courses.

Educated in History and Theology in London, Oxford, Manchester and the United States, Ric was previously Chaplain at University College in Durham and served in parochial ministry in the Kensington Episcopal Area of the Diocese of London. He was born and grew up in Stockport.

Ric's current Diocesan Bishop, the Right Reverend Mark Tanner, Bishop of Chester, said:

"Ric is an experienced and wise priest and an energising theologian. We will miss him in Chester, but I am delighted that he will be serving the Diocese of Newcastle in this role and commend him to you all very warmly and assure you of my ongoing prayers."

Dean of Newcastle, the Very Reverend Lee Batson welcomed Ric's appointment: "Ric will become a Canon in our cathedral and we are very excited to be welcoming him to our diocese. The Cathedral has undergone significant change with our recent multi-million pound refurbishment and he is joining us at a really exciting time as we discern how we can be an even stronger resource to the wider Diocese as it witnesses to the love of God."

Remembering in Newcastle Diocese



Bishop Helen Ann pictured with students from Newcastle College.



Bishop Helen-Ann and the Revd Canon Pete Askew pictured at Old Eldon Square on Remembrance Sunday.



Pictures: Steve Brock Photography



The Revd Canon Lee Batson pictured at Old Eldon Square on Remembrance Sunday.



Remembrance services took place across the Diocese as communities paid tribute to the fallen from the two world wars and in other conflicts past and present.

On Armistice Day (Saturday, 11 November), The Revd Canon Lee Batson, The Dean of Newcastle, observed two minutes of

silence at Newcastle's St Nicholas Square.

On Remembrance Sunday, Bishop Helen-Ann led a service at Old Eldon Square which was attended by dignitaries including the Lord Mayor of Newcastle, Cllr Veronica Dunn.

There were also Remembrance Sunday

services at Newcastle Cathedral and in churches and at war memorials across the Diocese.

Earlier, on November 10, Bishop Helen-Ann accepted an invitation to join students from Newcastle College to give the address at their Remembrance Service.

This Advent, Newcastle Cathedral will host a series of festive activities inspired by St Nicholas, the holy figure who inspired Santa Claus and to whom the Cathedral is dedicated.

On St Nicholas Day, Wednesday 6 December at 6pm, the Cathedral's patronal festival will see the renowned Choir of Durham Cathedral join forces with Newcastle Cathedral Choir. This service will mark the beginning of a remarkable milestone: the 90th anniversary of the Friends of St Nicholas, a dedicated group committed to raising funds for the Cathedral.

Founded nine decades ago, the Friends of St Nicholas have a clear mission – to “maintain and beautify” the Cathedral's heritage.

Lesley Lee, a Cathedral volunteer and the secretary of the Friends, said: “The Friends’ groups emerged during the 1920s and 1930s, a time between the wars when cathedrals faced substantial financial challenges. Over the years, the Friends have played a vital role in supporting various conservation initiatives and funding enhancements for the Cathedral which would have otherwise been impossible.

“In the past couple of years, the Friends of St Nicholas has played a crucial role in conserving items like the exquisite silver verge, which is used in services, and have contributed to the creation and publication of the Cathedral's latest guidebook.”

In addition to their invaluable support, the Friends offer a diverse programme of outings and events, allowing members to connect, share



Lesley Lee, secretary of the Friends of St Nicholas.

Celebrate St Nicholas with Newcastle Cathedral's Friends



Members of the Newcastle Cathedral Choir performing.

common interests, and take part in exclusive tours of local historical and cultural landmarks.

Lesley added: “We are always eager to welcome new members of all ages and people of all faiths and none who share an interest in preserving this fantastic building.”

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, families can get creative at the Cathedral's craft station and embark on a special trail using a free booklet that guides visitors around the Cathedral to discover images of St Nicholas and learn how his faith and generosity continue to inspire us today.

Historically, Nicholas of Myra was a bishop known for his acts of charity towards the poor. He is believed to have participated in the Council of Nicaea in 325, where pivotal Christian doctrines were established, many of which we still follow today.

The Very Reverend Lee Batson, who was installed as the Dean of Newcastle in October, said: “One thing that makes Newcastle Cathedral truly special at this time of year is that, among the 42 Church of England cathedrals, this is the only one dedicated to St Nicholas.



The St Nicholas Verge was conserved with the support of the Friends.

“The Friends have marvellously upheld the generous spirit of St Nicholas for nine decades, contributing to the preservation of this building. Through their gifts, we can continue to serve our diverse communities, tell the Cathedral's story, and share in God's joy together.”

For more information and to join in the festive celebrations, please visit **here**. To find out how to join the Friends of St Nicholas, see **here**.

I am writing this article two months into my placement at the Cathedral from St Andrew's in Corbridge where I have been Assistant Curate since my ordination in 2020. It has already been a wonderful opportunity to gain an insight into the Cathedral's worship and the role it plays within the Diocese and city of Newcastle.

I have been struck by the way in which the Cathedral's daily rhythms of prayer and worship help to underpin the variety of other things taking place, from organ recitals through to Pop Up Hospitals (held in partnership during school holidays with the Great North Children's Hospital). There are so many people involved in sustaining the life of the Cathedral, and it has been a real joy getting to know people here - including some of those who come through the Cathedral's doors each day as visitors.



NEWCASTLE
CATHEDRAL

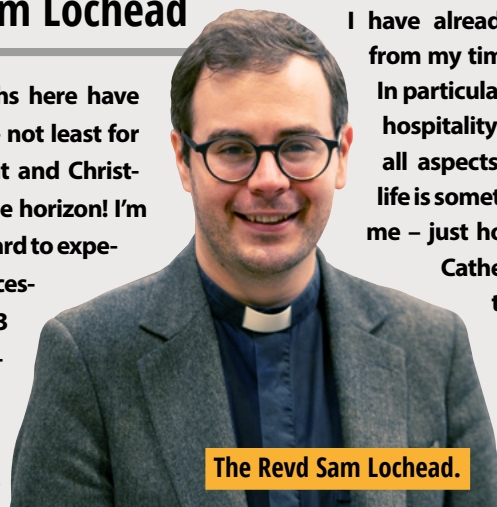
View from the Lantern

By The Revd Sam Lohead

My first couple of months here have been a great grounding - not least for the excitement of Advent and Christmas which are now on the horizon! I'm particularly looking forward to experiencing the Advent Procession of Light on Sunday 3 December, as the Cathedral moves from near darkness to radiant

light, starting Advent by expressing the journey of the whole season. There's also the Patronal Festival on 6 December which will see the Choir of Durham Cathedral sing alongside our own and celebrate the 90th anniversary of the Friends of St Nicholas, the Cathedral's Friends membership scheme.

I have already learnt so much from my time at the Cathedral. In particular, the ways in which hospitality flows throughout all aspects of the Cathedral's life is something I will take with me - just how much space the Cathedral holds for those it welcomes, and just how many different forms that 'radical welcome' takes.



The Revd Sam Lohead.

Picture: Lang Shot Photography

Memorial bells: a tribute to the fallen

A fascinating art installation commemorating lives lost during World War I was displayed at St Aidan's Church in Bamburgh during November.

The extraordinary installation of nine large bells, by Keith Roberts, mark the Battle of Caporetto in Italy during 1917.

The sculpture of broken and fractured bells represent the chaos and upheaval that war and its devastating consequences bring.

The installation included a recording of John Casken's choral work *Memorial*, commemorating 12 men from Upper Coquetdale who were lost during World War I.



The installation by Keith Roberts at St Aidan's Church in Bamburgh.



Generous Giving: capturing the generosity of seasonal visitors



Generous Giving Team – Leanne Conway-Wilcox, Dennis Fancett and Joanne Christie.

By Joanne Christie
Generous Giving Team Leader

This has been a fantastic year for the growth of contactless giving in our diocese. In March, 30 devices were gifted to parishes as part of the National Digital Giving Rollout. Many other churches purchased their own contactless giving equipment this year too, taking the total number of active devices in our diocese to over 100.

It's difficult to quantify precisely what this achievement means for parishes in monetary terms, but what we do know is that in just eight months over **£25,000** has been received by parishes in gifts made via the 30 'Rollout' devices alone. A further **£6,000** has been donated to parishes during a similar time frame through our 12 Goodbox Cores devices - available for parishes to loan simply by contacting the **Generous Giving Team**.

With Christmas fast approaching, churches are now beginning to think about how to make the most of a new device to capture the generosity of seasonal visitors. Many people who wouldn't otherwise be in church are more than willing to show support by making a donation, so it's important to make the process as easy as possible and ensure people know why their generosity matters.

Christmas is also a great opportunity for



Contactless giving equipment is now in over 100 churches in our diocese.

churches to use digital giving mechanisms to run special appeals, perhaps in support of a local cause, recognising that for some Christmas can be a very difficult time of year.

The average contactless donation in the Diocese of Newcastle is just under £10, so it only takes a handful of 'taps' at each service to help make a difference to a particular cause or to help ensure our churches are a place of wel-

come over the Christmas period and beyond. With this in mind, we've created some top tips for making the most of contactless giving at Christmas, including how to create an eye-catching festive look for the front screen of your device! Please visit **Resources for a Generous Christmas** for further details or get in touch with the team who would be delighted to set up a Christmas appeal for your device remotely.

'There is something about asking ourselves questions, which leads us into a deeper understanding of God'



Dennis Fancett wonders who looked after the sheep when the shepherds rushed to Bethlehem.

Picture: J. Schiemann / Unsplash.

By Dennis Fancett Giving Ministry Adviser

As a child, I always had a question about the Christmas story: who looked after the sheep when the shepherds abandoned their fields that night, and rushed down into Bethlehem?

Maybe one of the angels agreed to hang around and mind the shop. Or perhaps, in addition to all the other miracles taking place that day, the Lord God had a quiet word with the foxes and wolves, normally a danger to the flock, and told them to stay away. The Bible is silent on the issue, and most of us would accept that in the overall scheme of things, it is hardly an important point.

Yet there is something about asking our-

selves questions, which leads us into a deeper understanding of God. Peter was to discover this in the conversation recorded in Matthew 16: 15, when Jesus prompted him to consider "Who do you say I am?"

So for me, meditating on this seemingly trivial question has been surprisingly helpful. Those sheep were the shepherds' livelihood. If the sheep had been attacked by a wild animal, the shepherds would have lost money. If the whole flock had been destroyed, they would have become destitute. There was a huge amount at stake.

The Bible does however make it absolutely clear that something seismic had happened, was happening, and those humble shepherds were included too. No

wonder they rushed off, not bothering to think through the financial implications of their hasty actions. Salvation had come to the hills and fields of Bethlehem, and they were invited to receive freely and be part of it.

We may not have had a dramatic encounter with an angel like the Christmas shepherds did. Our own revelation of the great truth may have been in somewhat less remarkable circumstances. Possibly it was more gradual, over a period of time, or even something that's been with us since childhood. But will we let it override our usual and legitimate concerns about our financial security and respond generously to God, as we too join with the shepherds in prioritising our response to the gospel above all other things that may be of value in life?

Introducing Beyond Youth - connecting with young people in South East Northumberland

An exciting new youth project is gathering momentum in South East Northumberland. Beyond Youth is all about creating Christian communities and developing ways of engaging with children, young people, and their families in Ashington; Seaton Hirst; Woodhorn and Newbiggin-by-the-Sea; and Creswell and Lynemouth.

Diocesan Youth and Children's Enabler Becca Cooper is working alongside Youth Adviser Susan White, and Dave Johnson, who is Youth and Children's Coordinator for South East Northumberland.

The project has a newly designed logo which cleverly abbreviates Beyond Youth to 'Be You', which has already started to make its way onto hoodies and t-shirts.

The team has visited Duke's Secondary School in Ashington and will also work with primary schools within the Northumberland Church of England Academy Trust (NCEAT).

They are also meeting youngsters out and about in communities - introducing themselves, the project and also encouraging interaction with parents and families.



From your children, youth and families team

Dave explained: "It's early days but we are making good progress. Up to now we have met with youngsters in Seaton Hirst Parish and will be heading to Newbiggin next week.

"We are taking hot chocolate with us, a football and chalk. It's an opportunity for us to engage with youngsters and tell them about the project. But at first we're just trying to introduce ourselves, so they can have a hot chocolate with us, kick a ball about and perhaps play some games with chalk, whether it be hopscotch or Connect 4, or some chalk-based art."

While the team members are fully DBS checked, dressed in the project's branding and have identification, they are encouraging children - aged eight to 15 - to tell their parents initially before returning to engage with the project.

"We want to be a reassuring presence," said Dave. "We want youngsters, parents and families to know about us and we want them to be involved with the project. We also ask about allergies before handing out hot chocolate."

Both in the communities and in the schools, Beyond Youth will focus its initial work around conversation cards, life, faith and community, with themes including events such as All Souls and Remembrance.



Beyond Youth is making a big impact in South Northumberland.

Dave added: "We want to build relationships with youth workers as well as the children and teenagers. There is potential for clubs to be set up, if there is a need for them but at the moment we're just introducing ourselves and the Beyond Youth Project. We'd appreciate your prayers as we move forward with this exciting new initiative."

The project is set to be commissioned on 16 January 2024 at St Bartholomew's Church in Newbiggin, at 7pm.

Beyond Youth is seeking volunteers to get involved. There's more information on social media - (Facebook.com/BeyondYouthNE and @BeyondYouthNE on Instagram and Twitter).

Lighting up the not-so-scary side of Halloween

By Susan White
Youth Adviser

This term we wanted to support parishes in hosting events at Halloween, with a focus on Jesus and sharing the light for all to see.

You might have heard of light parties before. As well as being a way to discourage all that is scary about Halloween, it's a great opportunity to provide a one-off springboard activity to invite people to regular events, either as outreach or simply to maintain contact following summer clubs.

We hosted events in Prudhoe with ecumenical partners; at St Andrews, Ashington; Lynemouth Holiday Club with the Bacmans charitable organisation; and in Alnwick with youth clubs and the Ignite Christian charity.

These were fantastic and are the type of outreach events which churches and communities can easily be involved with - and we always make sure our themes flow through all the activities.

In Lynemouth, we held a light party session during half term. There were initial concerns that it might be 'too churchy', but it was a resounding success.



A wide range of activities during light parties proved that Halloween doesn't have to be scary.



The Revd Julia Lacey, Priest in Charge at Cresswell and Lynemouth said: "The children loved the group games and were busy making all sorts of lovely crafts and cakes. What impressed me most was the depth of their reflections and their thoughtfulness when we sat down together to talk about who could guide us and how we might be able to hear and pay attention to God's voice in our lives."

At Prudhoe we joined together with the churches in the town. The hall looked amazing with beautiful lights and colourful table activities and games - giant Snakes and Ladders, a blindfolded obstacle course and Lego challenges.

The Revd Daniel Freyhan, vicar at St Mary Magdalene, Prudhoe said: "One of my biggest joys was not just seeing the good turnout of families and young people but also people who chose to come who we've been trying to reach out to. For them coming to a church event which was in direct competition with trick or treating time, represents a fairly significant decision. It shows God is at work in their lives."

There was also an array of fun-filled activities and meaningful conversations in Ashington.

My hope is through these events we have built up trusting partnerships, and impacted the young people positively giving them a safe space and opportunity to think about Jesus.

Small grants available to support creativity in children and youth engagement



The story themed bags have been a success at Prudhoe.

The Children and Youth team have a small amount of money available to facilitate parish projects to engage with children and young people.

Recently the team awarded £250 to St Mary Magdalene, Prudhoe, to help with improvements to their story themed bags. The bags are used to engage families with Biblical themes and keep children entertained.

St Mary Magdalene supports families with a dedicated member of the congregation - wearing a colourful badge - who welcomes new families and answers any questions they may have. The aim is to encourage and support people who may find church challenging as new members or with children.

The church's PCC continues to develop a culture of growing younger and more diverse and this is a small step towards further

inclusivity and making sure everyone, even the youngest in their congregations are having their spiritual needs met.

If you have a project in mind that could benefit from a small grant then send an overview of what you would like to do and why, to Tara Russell at: t.russell@newcastle.anglican.org and she will consider whether the team can make a small contribution to the cost.

'Hopeful Advent' – a series of reflections with Compline for Advent

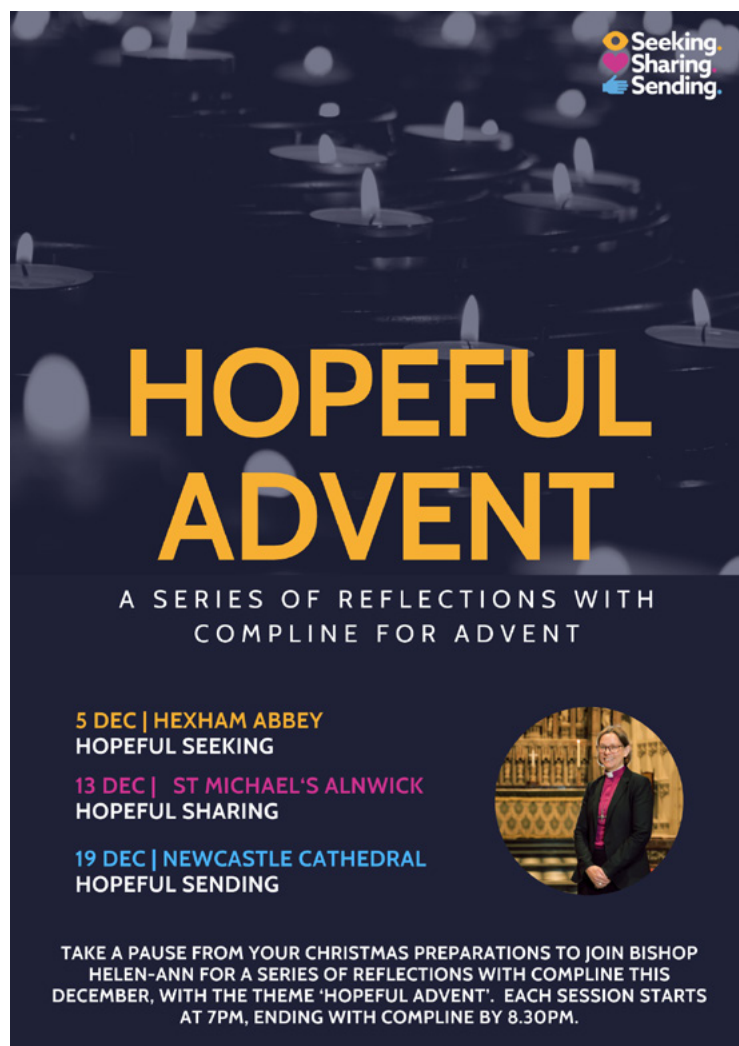
Take a pause from your Christmas preparations to join Bishop Helen-Ann for a series of reflections with Compline this December, with the theme 'Hopeful Advent'. Advent is a season of expectation and preparation, as the Church prepares to celebrate the coming of the light of Christ at Christmas.

*When the Lord comes,
he will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness,
and will disclose the purposes of the heart.
Therefore in the light of Christ let us confess our sins.
cf 1 Corinthians 4.5*

These evenings offer Complines as a time for quietness and reflection amidst the hustle and bustle of the season.

5 December - Hexham Abbey, 'Hopeful Seeking'
13 December - St Michael's, Alnwick, 'Hopeful Sharing'
19 December - Newcastle Cathedral, 'Hopeful Sending'

Each session starts at 7pm, ending with Compline by 8.30pm.




HOPEFUL ADVENT

A SERIES OF REFLECTIONS WITH
COMPLINE FOR ADVENT

5 DEC | HEXHAM ABBEY
HOPEFUL SEEKING

13 DEC | ST MICHAEL'S ALNWICK
HOPEFUL SHARING

19 DEC | NEWCASTLE CATHEDRAL
HOPEFUL SENDING



TAKE A PAUSE FROM YOUR CHRISTMAS PREPARATIONS TO JOIN BISHOP HELEN-ANN FOR A SERIES OF REFLECTIONS WITH COMPLINE THIS DECEMBER, WITH THE THEME 'HOPEFUL ADVENT'. EACH SESSION STARTS AT 7PM, ENDING WITH COMPLINE BY 8.30PM.

Bishops will help to put *Christmas in a Bag* for school children

Churches in a North Tyneside community are doing their bit to enhance the Christmas experience for local children.

St John's Church in Percy Main and St Peter's, Balkwell, are putting together educational packs, which will be handed out to school pupils in the parish.

The *Christmas in a Bag* packs will each contain a Christingle kit and other activities which tell the Christmas story.

Now the race is on to find chocolate selection boxes to complete each pack before they are handed out.

The Revd Lee Cleminson said boxes are already being generously donated in numbers, but more are needed to reach the target of 950.



The Cadbury's small selection boxes are piling up at St John's Church, Percy Main.

He explained: "We've been doing this for four years now and last Christmas we managed to receive 900 boxes.

"We think it's a lovely thing to do at because it gives the children something that is both fun

and educational in the run up to Christmas.

"Some parents have told us that they like to spend time doing these activities with their children on Christmas Eve. We're very grateful for all the boxes donated so far."

The packs, contained in carrier bags provided by the Children's Society, also include a blank Christmas card for the children to send to a special person of their choice.

People from the community volunteer to help collate the bags. This year, the volunteers will be joined by Bishop Mark, while Bishop Helen-Ann will be providing a short Christmas message to go inside the packs.

To donate – take a Cadbury Dairy Milk small selection box to St John's Church, Percy Main, on Monday's between 9.30am and 11.30am – no later than Monday 11 December.

Tree festival continues to grow after 15 years

Aspectacle of themed Christmas trees has been attracting people to a Newcastle church for 15 years. From a police-inspired 'special branch' tree, to one featuring a diver representing the local swimming pool, the annual *Festival of Decorated Christmas Trees* at St Hilda's Church in Jesmond has never been short of creative designs.

Inspired by a similar event in Gloucestershire, St Hilda's may have been the first church in the North East to put on such a festival when it started in 2008.

"It's always a lot of fun," said church member Lesley Dinning, ahead of this year's festival, which will take place on Saturday, 2 December.

She added: "We're always amazed at the different themes and designs people come up with. It attracts a lot of interest and brings people into the church. We're very much looking forward to this year's event and encouraging people to get involved."

The festival is also a competition and is open to individuals, groups, schools or businesses. In the week leading up to it, entrants can bring their trees into church either fully decorated, or to do the work once their tree has been stationed.

Lesley said: "Even after several years, the Special Branch tree entered by the police remains a firm talking point. Jesmond Pool & Gym once came up with the idea of a swimmer diving into a themed tree. The use of puns is also a big part of it. We've had a 'Sent to Coventree' titled entry and also a 'toiletree', which saw a tree placed inside a toilet."



Images of trees from past years including Family Tree and inset, Palm Tree.

More traditional entries are also popular, with themes

around Christmas and nativity helping to nurture the festive spirit at St Hilda's.

Festival day will start at 11am with a chance to view the trees, with the public handed the task of voting for their favourites. The day will include a wide range of stalls, while refreshments will be served. It will conclude with carol singing around the trees at 5pm, when

the winning trees will be announced.

Lesley added: "My son Stephen was living in Cheltenham when he first saw a Christmas tree festival at a local village. We think we were the first church in the North East to do it, but it's good to see that others have followed because it's a great way to engage with the community. We had to stop during Covid but it's 15 years since we started and it's a nice milestone."

The competition is open to all ages. Visit **here**.

Meet the people taking on volunteering roles in their community



Following our feature on volunteering clergy in the Autumn edition, here we speak to church member Paulette Thompson who helps out at her local hospital

Paulette Thompson is a familiar face at her local church, Holy Sepulchre in Ashington. But away from church life she has a crucial role to play on the stroke unit at Wansbeck General Hospital.

There, she meets people who have experienced unimaginable circumstances, where they have suffered life-limiting changes to their speech and mobility. Paulette's role as a volunteer is to be alongside stroke victims on the road to recovery, but in some cases, she is providing much needed comfort to those approaching the end of their lives.

"It's a privilege to be with people on their journey," said Paulette, who lives in Ashington. "People

of faith or people of none, I will be at their side."

Paulette has received training from speech and language therapists to help her communicate effectively with stroke victims.

"I can go with a smile, I can chat about anything and I can listen," she explained. "If there is a more spiritual need I can address it but I can refer people to the hospital chaplains. The training has given me an abundance of knowledge and I am learning all the time from my experiences."

Paulette has volunteered at Wansbeck for just over a year. Elsewhere, she is also an Anna Chaplain and previously was a volunteer with the chaplaincy team at the Marie Curie Newcastle Hospice.

"I've volunteered all my life, starting with the Brownies when I was 14," she added. "It is giving something back and it is also serving God. We

are committed to love our neighbour. It is the way that we can show love to all people."

Now retired, Paulette was previously employed by Benwell Christian Churches where she worked with volunteers who visited schools, sharing the scripture and word of God with children. She also spent time working with children and young people in schools and residential settings.

Paulette overcomes her own challenges to serve as a volunteer. Spinal problems restrict her mobility but she gets about with the use of a rollator walker which has a seat to save lifting chairs between patients.

"It's so rewarding to volunteer," she added. "Only in giving do you receive and I would say to anyone thinking about it to give it a go. Everyone has something to give. You have so much to give."

A 'warm North East welcome' for Trevor and Christine

When the BBC's Songs of Praise filmed a hymn singing session at St George's Church in Jesmond this year, the show's renowned 'superfans' Trevor and Christine Ransome were among the 500-strong congregation and were delighted to visit Newcastle Diocese.

The couple, from Cambridgeshire, have been regularly attending Songs of Praise hymn filming sessions since 2008 – and Jesmond was their 70th recording.

"We love singing hymns," said Trevor. "It was lovely to be part of Songs of Praise at Jesmond. St George's is a beautiful church and the setting is marvellous. It looked great with the lighting and the acoustics were very good. So many people were keen to speak to us and they gave us a lovely warm North East welcome."

Originally from Suffolk, Trevor and Christine met at a hymn singing event as teenagers. They were married in 1961 – the same year Songs of Praise was first broadcast.



Trevor and Christine Ransome.

In retirement, they began attending the Songs of Praise recording sessions – just like the one at Jesmond. They looked set to celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary, and the 60th anniversary of Songs of Praise, by attending their 60th recording – but the onset of the pandemic left them stuck on 58.

Nevertheless, they have made up for lost time since then and were very happy to make their 70th singing appearance at Jesmond.

"We are strong Christian people," said Trevor, who worked for a packaging company. "We have a strong faith and singing hymns is a wonderful way to express what we believe and what our faith is."

"Singing has run through our married lives," said Christine, who worked as a shorthand typist for a decade before bringing up the couple's two sons.

Now grandparents, Trevor and Christine were set to attend a Christmas edition of Songs of Praise at Sheffield City Hall on 14 November.

They also sing with the choir at All Souls Church in Langham Place, London, at venues including the Royal Albert Hall. At the end of September, they attended the BBC's Young Chorister of the Year in Manchester.

The couple were previously in Newcastle Diocese when Songs of Praise was filmed at St Andrew's Church, Corbridge, in March 2022.



Songs of Praise at St George's Church in Jesmond.

Time to Shine

By Helen Cunningham,
Church Engagement Officer,
Christian Aid

**christian
aid**

In Bangladesh, the Bengali word for Christmas is Borodin - or 'the big day'.

Decorations are hung, all kinds of tasty treats are made and there's plenty of singing. Not so different from how we celebrate Christmas in the UK.

But the rest of life is very different – especially for the women and girls of Bangladesh. But there is hope.

Kakoli, 21, lives in one of the most disaster-prone areas, Kurigram, in the north, where agriculture is the lifeline for most families. But climate change and flooding wreak havoc on their crops – leading to huge losses.

Kakoli longed for a different path. She said: "I explained to my parents that I don't want to marry, let me grow up. I want to study now. I am in the first year of my degree course. Girls need education. We don't realise that if we are educated, our children will be also."



**Kakoli set up a
Nakshi kantha
making business.**

Picture: Fabeha Monir/Christian Aid

Discovering Nakshi Kantha, a centuries-old Bengali art tradition known for its exquisite embroidered quilts, Kakoli recognised the potential of this traditional craft, not just as a source of income but also as a way to preserve a cherished cultural heritage. She launched her own business with training, start-up funding and support from Christian Aid and our partner Aid Comilla.

She added: "Without this support, we couldn't do this work and couldn't progress in the future. We were taught about e-commerce, internet browsing with a mobile phone, and how to know anything and do business."

Kakoli and 10 other young women have built a 21st century internet-based business by reviving Nakshi Kantha.

With a little help, women like Kakoli are transforming their lives and looking forward to bright futures.

This Christmas, as we celebrate the arrival of the Light of the World, we invite churches and local communities to support women to let their light shine.

Will your church join us to raise funds by **singing together**? Do it your way: sing in a shopping centre or a cathedral, a train station or supermarket, your church, local school or a local pub.

Singing not your thing? Host a mince pie and coffee morning, or download our **Nakshi Kantha Star template** and craft some decorations together!

Would your church hold a collection during Advent? Sign up to our **digital Advent wreath**, which provides joyful films one each for the four Sundays of Advent.

Everything you need to create some festive fun is on our website: caid.org.uk/advent.

"Skulls are cool" - Making friends with death?

In my undergraduate days, I was given a mug in the shape of a skull by a friend who was having a clear out. It was recently unpacked after years in storage and almost immediately joined by a brightly painted sugar-skull variant, courtesy of my daughter who remains fascinated by both. In turn, for her birthday, we bought her a soft toy skull - who now goes by the name of "Mr Skull" or simply "Skully".

In his recent children's book, "The Skull", Jon Klassen retells a folk tale about a girl who runs away and finds peace, living in a secluded forest house with a friendly talking skull. Terry Pratchett's Death is a bemused character who finds much to love and value in humanity. In "Bill & Ted's Bogus Journey" Death loses at chess and ends up playing bass in their band.

We seem to have come a long way from

LIKE A METAPHOR

Tim Hardy, formerly of the Religious Resources Centre, works from the home he shares with Ros, Anwen and Twinkle.



Webster seeing the skull beneath the skin and "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."

But, for centuries, Christians have kept memento mori - statuary, paintings or poetry on the theme of death - to remind us of our mortality; it's vital to our spiritual lives to keep one eye on where we're going and live accordingly. It's healthy to be aware that death is part of existence: we are born, we live, we die.

In Philippians, Paul puts off his desire to

"depart and be with Christ" to continue living the life of service he knows is "more necessary". We are called to life, not to death - and there's plenty to be getting on with along the way. If we live lives that feed the hungry, care for the sick, comfort the bereaved and bring freedom - all the Kingdom-related activities summarised in the old song, "Ain't Got Time to Die", we might find that we don't have time to die either.

But, die we will. And, although the process of dying may not be an entirely pleasant experience in itself, we are assured that Jesus has gone ahead of us, defeating death along the way and has prepared space for us in the life to come.

In the meantime, I've just seen that Lego now offer a "Large Skeleton Ceramic Mug" - I think I'll add it to my Christmas list.

Book launched in Fred's memory will raise funds for Gosforth church

A book has been launched in memory of a man who dedicated many years of service to Newcastle Diocese. The proceeds of 'Just Fred', written about the life and times of the late Fred Wilkinson by his wife Margaret, will go to All Saints Church in Gosforth, where he served as church warden.

Fred, who died in 2002, was a well-known figure in the North East and for many years, was headteacher at Dame Allan's School in Newcastle.

A devout Christian, he carried out numerous roles in the Diocese. For 12 years, Fred served as lay chairman of the Diocesan Synod and also held other key positions. He chaired the Vacancy-in-See Committee and the Northumbrian Industrial Mission and was involved in other projects.

The book has been years in the making. Margaret, now aged 93, said All Saints Church was very close to her late husband's heart.

"We joined All Saints 53 years ago," she said. "In his last year he became church warden – finally – and it really did mean a lot to him. The other day I was marvelling at how much it has changed at All Saints over the decades, but it has always remained a very warm and caring community."



Margaret Wilkinson (seated, right) with the Revd Canon Andrew Shipton and Julia Grint at the book launch. The front cover of Just Fred and Fred Wilkinson.

The book has been years in the making. Margaret initially started to compile a record of her life with Fred for family, after sifting through boxes of carefully filed paperwork, including diaries.

She teamed up with Julia and Alan Grint of Ergo Press in Hexham, who were delighted to produce the fascinating account in book form. Earlier this month a launch event for the book took place at All Saints.

The Revd Canon Andrew Shipton, of All Saints Church said: "I knew Fred having served my curacy here and he was a very warm and dedicated man.

This has been a long-term project for Margaret. It's a credit to her determination that we've got to this stage and the book is a fascinating and moving read. We are very grateful that all proceeds will go to All Saints in Fred's memory."

Away from writing, Margaret remains active and continues to serve as a trustee of St Hilda's Trust, which supports charities and organisations which work with disadvantaged children and young people within the boundaries of the Diocese. More information about the trust can be found [here](#).

To obtain a copy of Just Fred, email post@all-saints-gosforth.org.uk

Action on climate change

An Anglican chaplain based in Newcastle Diocese is at the forefront of a national campaign on climate change.

Cloud and Fire explores ways of breaking down the challenges posed by climate change to help clergy and other people with church roles to deal with the impact it has on pastoral care.

It is being led by the charity Green Christian, which works to build relations between environmental campaigners and Christians. Since 2021, the charity has been providing support to clergy, spiritual directors, church wardens and church council members grappling with the emotional, pastoral, spiritual and moral impacts of the climate crisis on individuals and communities.



The Revd Andii Bowsher, who is chaplain at Northumbria University, is among those developing the Cloud and Fire programme which will resume with a series of online sessions in the New Year.

He added: "We recently learned that the West Antarctic ice sheets are likely to collapse over the next decades. This will add up to five metres of sea level rise. This cannot but affect the mission of the churches. Even if our own areas are not directly affected, the displacement of people, agriculture and the geopoliti-

cal tensions will be immensely challenging.

"The Church has always learned to be part of good responding to challenging times. We need to do so again, and we can improve our response by beginning to prepare ourselves now. I'd encourage people in our region to consider Cloud and Fire as a way to face our concerns and fears in a supported and prayerful context."

In addition to Cloud and Fire Green Christian also offers Deep Waters which enables church groups to explore their feelings about climate change and engage constructively with them. A Lent course is also about to be published for 2024.

For more information click [here](#)