

LINK

The magazine for the Diocese of Newcastle

MARCH 2024

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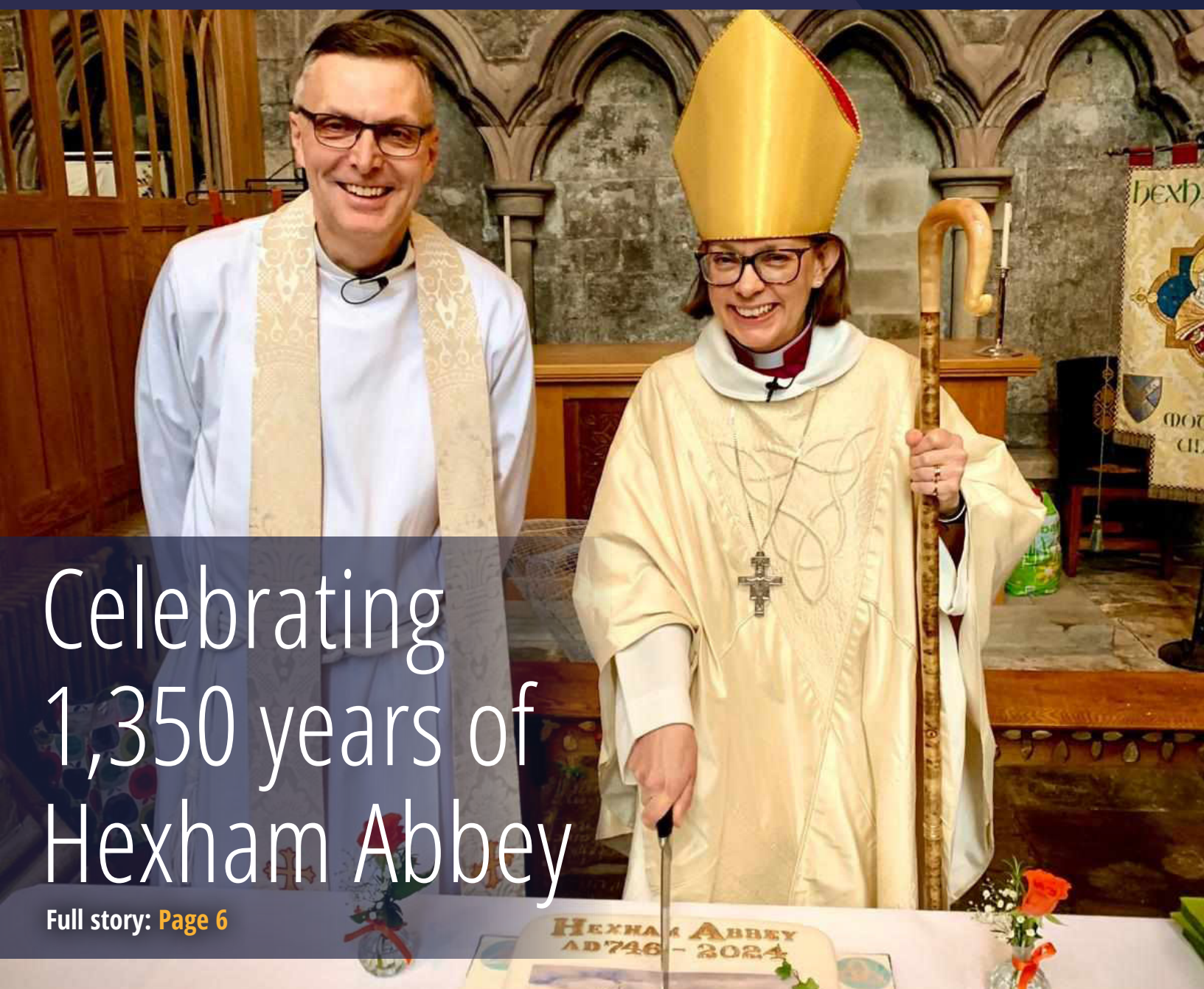
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Extra



Celebrating
1,350 years of
Hexham Abbey

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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**

'The Only One'

Recently at a morning for Deanery Development Planning Groups, we looked together at Elijah's encounter with God on Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19), where God was not to be found in the earthquake, wind or fire but in the 'sound of sheer silence'. God's recurring question to his prophet was, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'

No doubt, we will have asked ourselves the same question from time to time – what are we doing here?! What circumstances, accidents or designs led us to where we find ourselves? How can we trace the fingerprints of God in the twists and turns of our life journeys?

Elijah responds to God's question: 'I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left...'

I am struck by his rather plaintive observation, 'I alone am left.' There are many times when we feel like we are 'the only one'. We may resist people who tell us they know how we feel, but at the same time we can have a deep sense of isolation or even abandonment. I was profoundly struck by the TV drama, 'Mr Bates vs The Post Office', where each postmaster or postmistress was told they were 'the only one' experiencing issues with the faulty computer software. They were left profoundly distressed and despairing that it was only them. It can be a deeply debilitating deception to believe that we are 'the only one'.

Yet God's presence in the sound of sheer silence begins to open up Elijah to a new reality. The reality that he is not alone, and that he can trace God's design and fingerprints in the direction and purpose of his life.

This Season of Lent invites us to ponder God's question: 'What are you doing here?'

It's time to reflect on where we see the signs

and hints of God's touch and purpose in our lives. At the same time, this season invites us to trace the journey of Jesus to the cross. The cross is Jesus' answer to that same question. A path of such suffering, which only he could walk to bring ultimate healing and forgiveness for the whole world. A solitary path, walked by Jesus Christ alone, but in the deepest solidarity with all our injustices, desolation and despair.

Lent helps us see through the deceptions that can derail us, by reminding us that we do not live to ourselves alone, but we live in the presence of God, finding life and meaning in his love. A love that helps us answer the question: 'What are you doing here?'

In journeying together in this season, may we discover a renewed solidarity with one another and with God. Reminded that though we are truly and wonderfully unique, we are not, and never, alone. We are, and always, deeply loved.

The Rt Revd Mark Wroe

Christingles shine Light of the World into 2024



Bishop Helen-Ann joins Warkworth Church of England Primary School's Candlemas celebrations early in February.



Children pictured at Newcastle Cathedral.

People of all ages joined together for Christingle services across the diocese at Christmas and well into the new year. In January, a Christingle took place at Newcastle Cathedral organised by the Children's Society, which supports children and young people facing severe challenges, including abuse, neglect and exploitation. The interactive service was attended by school children from across the Diocese and led by the Dean of Newcastle, the Very Revd Lee Batson.

In February, Bishop Helen-Ann was delighted to be invited to join Warkworth Church of England Primary School's Candlemas celebrations, helping them to light their Christingles and also taking part in a Q&A

Continues on page 5



Five generations of the Skeels family.

Continued from page 4

session while she was there (see main photo on page 4).

It followed a memorable festive period in December. Notably, there was a good turnout at churches in the Benefice of Christ the King, where a congregation of 100 worshippers at St Matthew's Church in Dinnington Village marked a welcome return to pre-Covid attendance levels. Meanwhile, 74 worshippers at St Cuthbert's, Brunswick, matched the church's pre-Covid attendance level.

Among those at Brunswick were five generations of the Skeels family. Pictured above with the Revd Mark Edwards MBE is Lily and Imogen, their father Jordan Skeels, his mother Jade Skeels, her mother Maggie Sciberras, and her mother, Elsie Phillips aged 99.



Interim Director of Education Gill Booth enjoys the Christingle.



The Dean of Newcastle, the Very Revd Lee Batson.



Bishop Helen-Ann made a special visit to Hexham Abbey as a programme of events to mark its 1,350th anniversary got underway. She joined the Revd Canon David Glover, the Rector of Hexham Abbey, for a special service on Sunday, 4 February.

It was part of a spectacular opening weekend to what will be a year of celebrations throughout 2024. Visitors turned out for a Festival of Flame, which saw the historic Abbey illuminated both inside and out. The impressive installation included both candles and music.

The weekend also included the launch of Stars for Eternity, with no fewer than 5,000 origami stars suspended high above the Abbey's old choir stalls - each star representing someone special from past or present, nominated by local people.

Spectacular photos from the Festival of Flame, and the full story of the opening weekend will be in the next printed version of Link, which will be available in March. You can also [click here](#).

To keep up to date with forthcoming events [click here](#).



Bishop Helen-Ann and the Revd Canon David Glover cut the anniversary cake.

Bishop Helen-Ann joins the anniversary celebrations at Hexham Abbey



Bishop Helen-Ann and the Revd Canon David Glover with the High Sheriff of Northumberland Diana Bakes, beneath the Stars For Eternity display.

Pictures: Jane Pikett / Hexham Abbey

Classic FM showcase paves way for Cathedral Choir's eagerly-awaited Palm Sunday performance

TV and radio personality Alexander Armstrong visited Newcastle Cathedral Choir for Choral Evensong in early February - setting the stage for a series of accolades and a remarkable upcoming performance of J.S. Bach's St John Passion on Palm Sunday, 24 March.

The Classic FM host, who is Ambassador for Cathedral Music Trust, selected the Cathedral as part of his 'Choral Adventure', spanning five days and encompassing four cathedrals and a Cambridge college. For the Cathedral Music Trust social media channels, Alexander spoke to choristers, choral scholars, and members of the music team, some of whom have scholarships and opportunities funded by the Cathedral Music Trust.

The day after his visit, Alexander showcased the Choir's rendition of Vaughan Williams' 'The Bird's Song' from their latest album, *A Year at Newcastle*, on his Classic FM radio show. He also took to X (formerly Twitter) to write: "The choir's breathtaking Evensong left me deeply moved – exciting developments are happening at Newcastle."

Originally from Rothbury and himself a former chorister, Alexander was particularly interested



Alexander Armstrong at the lectern.



Alexander Armstrong with the Dean of Newcastle, the Very Revd Lee Batson, and Bishop Helen-Ann.

in the Cathedral's involvement in the National Schools Singing Programme. This innovative project involves working within 11 primary schools across the city to introduce children from diverse backgrounds to cathedral music.

The Choir's latest album, featuring solos by some of its youngest members, has also received praise. In his review, Andrew Palmer from the Yorkshire Times hailed the singing of the Choir as "splendid", applauding the "selection of repertoire and accomplished performances representing the highlights of a musical year."

The upcoming Palm Sunday rendition of J.S. Bach's St John Passion by the Cathedral Choir promises a captivating experience, with baroque instruments evoking the ambiance of Leipzig 300 years ago, when the piece was first performed.

Director of Music, Ian Roberts, said: "We are particularly looking forward to performing Bach's masterwork as part of Holy Week at the

Cathedral. Three centuries ago, Bach's child and teenage singers were first tackling this extraordinary music. Similarly, for our young choristers this will be a very special experience, singing music of such great spiritual intensity along with some of the North of England's foremost early music instrumentalists."

Tickets for the performance on Sunday 24 March at 5pm are available for £20 through the Cathedral's Ticket Source page [here](#).

Newcastle Cathedral Choir's album *A Year at Newcastle* can be purchased from the Cathedral's retail area or as a CD/digital download from Regent Records.

You can hear the Choir sing at Choral Evensong from Sunday to Thursday during school term time or watch the live-streamed services via the Cathedral's [YouTube channel](#). Stay updated on the latest music schedule by visiting [here](#).

Retirements in Newcastle Diocese



The Revd Canon Glyn Evans (centre) pictured with the Revd Dorothy Robinson and the Revd Andrew Patterson.

Two long-serving members of the clergy in Newcastle Diocese have retired within the first quarter of 2024.

The Revd Canon Glyn Evans has retired as Team Rector of North Shields benefice, where he had served since 2017. He was made an Honorary Canon of Newcastle Cathedral in 2011 and was appointed police chaplain the same year.

Glyn started out as a curate in Denton from 1988 to 1992, before moving on to Choppington (1992-1997) and then onto Longhorsley, where he was priest in charge until 2001.

Having previously served as chaplain to HMP Acklington from 1997 to 2001, Glyn is continuing as a chaplain to the deaf and is Canon Emeritus at Newcastle Cathedral.

Since 2008, the Revd Canon Jeremy Thompson served as Rector of the Benefice of St John Lee and as Vicar for the

Benefice of Warden with Newbrough.

A native of the North East, Jeremy has lived and worked in Newcastle and Northumberland all his life, spending the early part of his career as an antique clock restorer and clockmaker.

He served his title at St Cuthbert's, Bedlington, before moving onto St Paul's, Choppington. There was a new direction for Jeremy in 2008 when he moved to the Tyne Valley to join the parishes of St John Lee, Warden and Newbrough.

Jeremy has also served as Clergy Major Incident Plan (MIP) Co-ordinator, and spent five years as Area Dean of Hexham. He was installed as an Honorary Canon in 2021.

We wish Glyn and Jeremy well and thank them for their years of service and dedication in Newcastle Diocese.

Holy Week and Easter at Newcastle Cathedral

In addition to Newcastle Cathedral Choir's spectacular performance of J.S. Bach's St John Passion on Palm Sunday, 24 March, you can attend the following services in-person or watch the live-streamed services via the Cathedral's YouTube channel [here](#).

Liturgy of the Palms – Sunday 24 March, 10am

Sung Compline with Address for Holy Week – Monday 25, Tuesday 26 & Wednesday 27 March, 8pm

Chrism Mass for Maundy Thursday – Thursday 28 March, 11am

Liturgy of the Last Supper – Thursday 28 March, 7pm (with Bishop Helen-Ann presiding)

Liturgy of the Cross – Friday 29 March, 2pm

Easter Vigil and First Eucharist of Easter – Saturday 30 March, 7pm

Festal Eucharist of Easter Day – Sunday 31 March, 10am (with Bishop Helen-Ann presiding)

Festal Choral Evensong – Sunday 31 March, 4pm



LOUDfence: Survivor- led event at Newcastle Cathedral

by Maggi Creese, Lead Officer,
Chaplaincy to Survivors

LOUDfence is a protest movement that started in Australia in 2015. The original idea was to tie brightly-coloured ribbons to a fence as a sign of support for and solidarity with survivors and victims of child sexual abuse. These 'loud' ribbons also represent a determination to break the silence around abuse. In coordination with our Roman Catholic colleagues in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, LOUDfences will be set up inside and outside Newcastle Cathedral and St Mary's Cathedral during the first week of March. The event will begin with an opening Mass at 11.30am at St Mary's Cathedral on Sunday 3 March, followed by a procession to Newcastle Cathedral.

Our LOUDfence event has been planned by Sarah Troughton, David Creese and Peter Locke, survivors of church-related abuse brought together by the Chaplaincy to Survivors. They



would like our fence to express support for and solidarity with victims and survivors of all forms of abuse in the Church, and they wanted to find a way to make the fence speak with something more distinctive than ribbons on their own. Last month we put out a call to all parishes for crafted strawberries, inspired by the artwork from *If I Told You, What Would You Do?* to tie on to our fence. We have been moved by the enthusiastic response from many knitting groups and individuals. Through these beautiful, 'loud' strawberries, crafters from all over the Diocese have joined their voices with those harmed in and by the Church.

Newcastle Cathedral will mark the LOUDfence with a Service of the Word at 7pm on Wednesday 6 March. Bishop Mark Wroe and other supporters will take part in the service, which has been planned by Sarah, David and Peter. Refreshments will follow. Attendees will have the opportunity to add a ribbon, strawberry or written message to the LOUDfence.

Alongside the LOUDfence in Newcastle Cathedral – on public display from Monday 4 until Friday 8 March – there will be a preview of a new



Ribbons outside St Peter's Church, Kirkbampton, in the Diocese of Carlisle, where the peace and reconciliation movement was started in the UK by Antonia Sobocki.



Knitted strawberries

creative project, based on the Stations of the Cross, entitled Jagged Edges. Sarah, David and Peter are co-creating their own set of stations, each approaching the gospel passion narratives from their own perspective and using a different artistic medium (linocut prints, poetry, music). When complete, Jagged Edges will become a resource for use in contexts like liturgy, Lent courses and Bible studies. We will launch these materials in spring 2025.

For more information about LOUDfence at Newcastle Cathedral, please visit [here](#).

Independent Safeguarding Audit

INEQE Safeguarding Group was appointed by the Archbishops' Council to conduct Independent Safeguarding Audits of the Church of England to make sure dioceses and cathedrals are doing all they can to create environments where everyone feels safe, valued and respected. As part of the audit process, INEQE hope to engage with these groups:

- Our Cathedral workforce
- Cathedral worshipping community
- Your parish workforce
- Parish worshipping communities
- Diocese workforce
- Victims and survivors
- Children and young people

If you are in one of these groups, we ask that

you complete the online survey [here](#). The survey is both anonymous and confidential (you will not be identified). We would therefore ask you to be open and honest with your responses. The survey results are received directly by INEQE's audit team and not by the Church of England. The survey is now live and will close at 11.30pm on Thursday 7 March 2024.

Generous Giving Spring Clinics expand to reach to Norham and Hexham deaneries



Following the resounding success of last year's Generosity Week clinics in Alnwick and Longbenton, the Generous Giving Team is expanding its reach with two additional clinic days scheduled in Norham and Hexham deaneries. The upcoming clinics will take place on Thursday, 6 March, at Lowick vicarage, and on Wednesday, 13 March, at St Cuthbert's Church Hall in Allendale.

Each clinic day will feature a series of individual sessions covering a variety of topics, including a Biblical Overview of Generosity, Encouraging Digital Giving, Legacy Giving, and Giving Reviews. These sessions are designed to be relaxed, informal, and kept to small numbers, ensuring ample time for



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

questions, interaction and direct support.

Attendees are encouraged to participate in as many sessions as they find relevant, with the flexibility to join as few or as many as they wish. However, due to limited space, all sessions must be booked in advance

using the provided booking links for either the Lowick or Allendale locations.

"We are excited to extend our Generous Giving clinics to the Norham and Hexham Deaneries, offering information and support to people interested in exploring generosity," said Joanne Christie, Generous Giving Team Leader.

Both returning attendees and newcomers are warmly welcomed to attend these clinics. Interested individuals are encouraged to visit the **Generous Giving Spring Clinics webpage** for additional information and to secure their places by booking in advance.

Book sessions **here**.

Ofsted awards 'Outstanding' rating to Riding Mill school for Early Years provision

Broomhaugh First School in Riding Mill is celebrating after it received the highest possible rating of 'outstanding' for its early years education from Ofsted inspectors. While the overall rating for the school is 'Good', inspectors judged the school Outstanding in two of four assessment areas - Early Years provision and personal development of pupils.

In the newly-published report, inspectors highlighted that the school is nurturing and inviting, lessons bring learning to life, pupils are well prepared for life locally and beyond, and the environment develops children's curiosity and independence.

Key findings from the inspection include:

- "Pupils are happy and safe... the emotional well-being of pupils is a priority".
- "Pupils achieve well. The school has introduced an ambitious and broad curriculum. There are high expectations for all pupils".
- "Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive the tailored support they need in lessons. They achieve well."
- "Lessons and classroom discussions raise pupils' aspirations".
- "There is a strong reading culture in school. Pupils learn to read quickly and confidently".
- "There are clear expectations of pupils'



Broomhaugh First School 'Outstanding' for Early Years



behaviour. Pupils behave well."

- "The school develops pupils' character and cultural capital exceptionally well. Pupils have a firm understanding of justice and equality. They are passionate about making the world a better place."
- "Children speak to adults with a high level of respect and kindness".
- "Pupils are well prepared for the transition to middle school."

Executive Head Teacher, Suzanne Hart said:

"As our motto says, staff and governors want Broomhaugh to be a magical school which gives children the best possible start in life and sets them up emotionally and educationally to make a difference and be the best they can be. We are over the moon that Ofsted inspectors believe we are achieving that ambition.

"The value of these inspections is in highlighting what we need to do to get to outstanding – which is our next goal. To be this close already is a major achievement, and we couldn't have done without the support of our parents and wider school community – to whom I'd like to express my thanks.



"On a personal level, it means the world to me that the inspectors immediately recognised the respect and kindness our children show every day and the effort we make to develop their character and awareness of the world around them – and beyond."

Co-chairs of the governing body, Elisabeth Charman and Gayle Baty, are equally as delighted. Elisabeth comments: "The outcome of the Ofsted inspection confirms what we knew about Broomhaugh being an excellent school, giving children the best possible start to their education. This takes hard work by a lot of people and we are proud to thank all staff, governors, parents and the children for working to make Broomhaugh thrive"

‘Hopeful Lent’ – a series of reflections with Evening Prayer for Lent



Take a pause to Join Bishop Helen-Ann for a series of reflections with Evening Prayer this Lent, with the theme, ‘Hopeful Lent’.

These events offer Evening Prayer as a time of reflection as the Church prepares to celebrate the good news of the risen Christ at Easter.

- 29 February – St Andrew’s Corbridge
- 7 March – St Aidan’s, Morpeth
- 21 March – St Bartholomew’s, Longbenton

Tea and coffee will be provided from 6.40pm, followed by Evening Prayer with a reflection from Bishop Helen-Ann, ending no later than 7.45pm.

There is no need to book a place, you are very welcome to come.

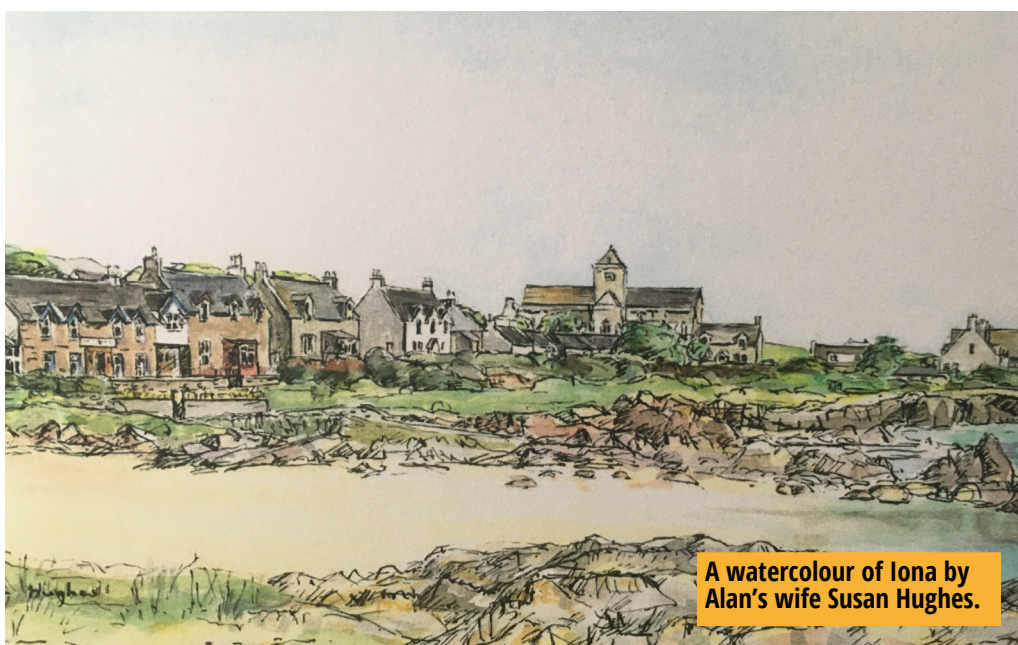
Spiritual rituals

With Canon Alan Hughes

A ritual has been described as a sequence of events involving actions, words and gestures. The explorer Bruce Parry recently visited a remote part of Siberia, to witness the rituals of the people of northern Russia. Bruce wanted to explore not only their day to day rituals of creating shelter, washing and clothing themselves, sourcing food, but also their spiritual rituals.

We live close to Holy Island, founded from the Isle of Iona, that great cradle of spirituality. The influence of the monks of Iona leading to the building of our present churches and chapels, within which spiritual rituals are repeated regularly, services or ceremonies of actions, words and gestures.

These rituals make sense to those involved but unless they are explained, uninitiated onlookers may look and listen in bewilderment. The meaning of the ritual needs to be explained, not least how that ritual affects the hearts of participants,



A watercolour of Iona by Alan’s wife Susan Hughes.

but how the ritual provides a foundation for their spirituality. Christianity was not spread from Holy island through silent Christians.

Bruce discovered that The Soviet Union had banned all expressions of religion and spirituality. Communities were allowed to dress in tribal costumes and follow rituals for tourists, repeat actions, words, gestures but they were not permitted to follow the ritual with their hearts.

Today they are free to rediscover the deep spirituality behind their rituals and share their spiritual insights with Bruce and others. This new freedom has made them more keenly aware of their spiritual insights than before, when expressions of them were banned. There is a spiritual revival.

Perhaps both in and out of our churches we might learn from the people of Northern Siberia. As Joni Mitchell once sang: “you never know what you’ve got til its gone”.

LIKE A METAPHOR

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



All the best tunes

The soundtrack to recent Hardy Family road trips has mostly been provided by Punk Rock Factory - a band whose raison d'être is turning Disney songs into raucous, rocked-up three-chorded wonders, and we've enjoyed singing along as we go. It's good fun to hear music I wouldn't normally think twice about usually - presented a little more in my style and I've had to review my opinion of some of the original song-writing.

It is a truth almost-universally acknowledged that Disney villains get all the best songs - King Louie in *'The Jungle Book'*, Ursula from *'The Little Mermaid'*, Oogie Boogie from *'The Nightmare Before Christmas'*, Elsa from *'Frozen'*.

Anwen disagrees vocally with that last choice but *'Let it Go'* is sung by a character so morally lost that she is beyond caring about the disastrous consequences of her actions and, because she is sympathetically portrayed and the song itself is catchy and rousing, we forget how monstrous her disregard for her sister and the people of the kingdom she is meant to be ruling actually is - we find ourselves singing along to nascent evil and not noticing.

The early Methodists caused uproar by setting their hymns to the catchiest dance tunes of their time and in my youth I would sing these songs as the theology seeped in, mostly unnoticed, to my head - musical parables (in the Adrian Plass sense of being outwardly distracting enough that we don't notice the truth creeping in by the back door), helping form my own understanding and beliefs. And, although the tunes themselves may not seem particularly danceable today (they've had a lifetime of being 'church music') I still love a 'good Wesley' - the contents and the style combining together and forming something more than the sum of the parts and providing a vehicle for some of the truths of the Christian faith.

"We are what we eat." The things we consume help form us, this is true. But Jesus tells us that it's what comes out of a person that makes them clean or unclean. We can enjoy our ice queens without emulating them and, if we find ourselves tapping our toes more often during the final hymn, that might not be such a bad thing.

Churches can help us to act on poverty



Esther Saizi and members of the village saving and loans group celebrating their achievements by dancing together.

Picture: Adam Haggerty/Christian Aid

By Juliet Lunam and Helen Cunningham, Christian Aid



election and with their newly elected MPs afterwards.

Proverbs 31:8 says 'speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed'. For more than 75 years, Christian Aid has done this – spoken up for those in need and worked, through local organisations, to support communities to find a way out of poverty.

But that's not all the organisation does. Christian Aid also aims to challenge the systemic and structural causes of poverty by holding those in power to account.

And now church communities are being given new tools to help campaign for those in their local area as well as their global neighbours.

Christian Aid has formed a new partnership with churches and other organisations - including the Baptist Union, Methodist Church, United Reformed Church, Church Action on Poverty, and the Trussell Trust.

Together, they have launched a course called **Act on Poverty**.

Hundreds of churches and individuals have already signed up to the initiative, aimed at encouraging people to put their faith into action.

Over six weeks, those taking part will find out more about the reality of poverty both in their communities and around the world, through activities designed to inspire them to engage with Parliamentary candidates ahead of the

The series of resource packs contain guidance for short Bible studies; recordings of conversations with activists; questions and prompts for group discussions; videos about taking practical action; and a guide to the steps churches can take to advocate for change.

Christian Aid Campaigns and Activism Officer Katrine Musgrave said: "We have hope for a world where there is justice for all and we believe our relationships and communities can be restored and transformed.

"We have an opportunity to unite our churches with a compelling message for our next Government: it is time to act on poverty.

"We hope churches around the country will sign up to Act on Poverty and we look forward to seeing the results of their actions."

Chief Executive of Christian Aid, Patrick Watt said: "Working in partnership is a core principle of Christian Aid and this course demonstrates the power of people coming together in faith.

"Every prayer, every gift, every action helps transform lives and I look forward to seeing church communities taking part in this initiative and putting into practice what they have discovered to tackle the injustice of poverty and its effects, both locally and globally."

For more information **click here**.

PLANNING ALREADY FOR SUMMER 24?



St. Hilda's Trust would like to consider the funding of activities organised by churches or schools in the diocese for summer 2024.

To apply for a summer 2024 grant, please do send applications to Kyrinn Whittaker, Secretary to the Trust.

Please do not send any later than Friday 1st March for activities between April - end of June or Friday 31st May for activities between start of July to end of August.