

Chester

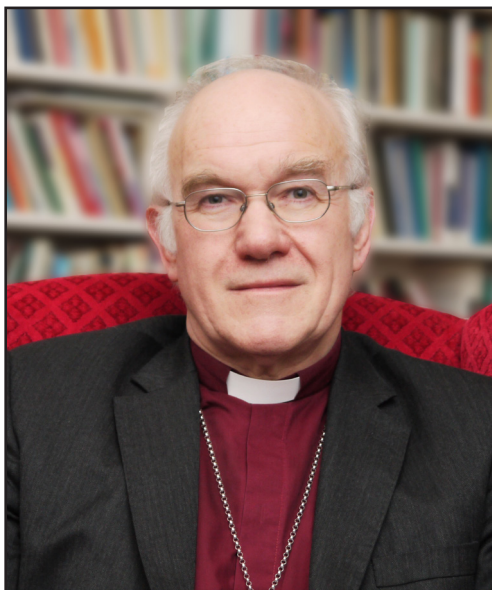
Diocesan News

December 2018

News, features, jobs...
chester.anglican.org

Growing stronger parishes

God's ways are not our ways



Christmas presents us with the beating heart of Christian Faith, that God – the Creator of the universe – became a human being. He didn't just make an appearance. He embraced the inner reality, and physicality, of being a human being.

If this is mysterious – and it always will be – the mystery deepened much more at the Cross. Charles Wesley captured it finely in his hymn:

*Tis mystery all, the Immortal dies
Who can explore his strange design.
In vain the firstborn Seraph tries,
To sound the depths of love divine.*

It is the mystery of love, of God's self-giving love, even unto death on a Cross.

Christmas presents this to us in its distinctive way. Jesus is, quite literally, God's Christmas Present to us. Like the best Christmas presents, Jesus took everyone by surprise. Nobody in Bethlehem was expecting the Messiah of Israel to appear, and especially not as a homeless baby.

Much of modern life circles around hopes and plans to control our lives: our health, our wealth, and everything else too. Politicians, of all parties, are driven by the dynamics of power, working for the day when they will be 'in power'. I say this as an observation, and not in criticism. The digital age confers upon all of us a power of communication, and power in general, beyond the wildest imagining of earlier generations.

Christmas invites us to acknowledge that God's ways are not our ways, and that his thoughts will cut across our thoughts, sometimes in the most surprising of ways.

Christmas invites us to gaze once more upon the Christmas Crib, and to be taken by surprise, by the eternal, mysterious surprise and wonder of God's love. A love which brought Jesus to Bethlehem, and onwards to Golgotha.

Where will this love take us and our world?

+Peter

FILLING THE GAP



Transforming Lives Together (TLT) has released a resource pack to help parishes that want to provide food and fun to children in the Christmas holidays. The resources are part of the Filling the Gap initiative which is aimed at children who rely on free school meals.

The handy resource pack includes all of the information a parish requires in order to run the Filling the Gap programme, including activity ideas, meal ideas, permission forms, safeguarding advice and theological reflections.

Kath Leigh is the Lead Community Builder for TLT. She says Filling the Gap is making a difference to children in our communities.

"We've got lots of different examples across the diocese of different churches

doing different things. We're finding that there are knock-on benefits now too. As well as children being fed, they're also experiencing things they can talk about to their school mates. One little boy reported back to his teacher that he had ran away with the circus during the school holidays, in reality he'd spent time learning circus skills and having his face painted at a local Filling the Gap project."

The Revd Margaret Jones, Whaley Bridge, took up the initiative earlier this year. "We agreed that here in Whaley Bridge we wanted to respond to this initiative. We decided to hold five free sessions at Holy Trinity Church, running from 11 am to 1 pm and including a sandwich, crisps and fruit lunch. We waited nervously on our first morning to see whether anyone would turn up.



Bishop Libby thanks volunteers for their help in providing fun and food to children during the school holidays.

We need not have worried because dead on 11 am the first families started arriving and they kept on coming in. On one occasion, we had 51 children there!"

The Bishop of Stockport has been a keen supporter of the initiative. Earlier this summer, Bishop Libby gave volunteers special plaques as a 'thank you' for their help in providing fun and food to children during the school holidays. She says: "The feeding of the 5000 is one of only a handful of stories that feature in all four gospels. Jesus had compassion on the crowd he had been teaching, and lives were transformed as Jesus took the limited resources offered by a small boy and satisfied their hunger. The Filling the Gap initiative is a way in which we can all follow Jesus' example of compassion including his instruction

to feed the hungry. With the Christmas holidays just a few weeks away, I would encourage you to do what you can, with what you have, now. Please download the Filling the Gap resources today and get started."

How to get involved

Is your church interested in providing fun and food to children during the school holidays?

Go to **titogether.org.uk** to download the Filling the Gap resources. The Christmas holidays are just around the corner.

Christmas in a Cheshire prison



Lisa Davies is the Managing Chaplain at HMP Styal, a women's prison in the heart of Cheshire. Here she shares some of her story of becoming a chaplain and paints a picture of what Christmas looks like for those behind bars in our diocese.

"Christmas is especially difficult on the inside, and especially Christmas Day itself, but we do try to make Christmas as painless as possible for the women.

I became a chaplain after being made redundant. I was looking for work when my friend asked me if I'd like to go along and help her in the classroom of HMP Hindley, a young offenders prison at the time. I walked in and realised right away that this is somewhere I was meant to be.

I soon became a teaching assistant and later completed my teaching qualifications. My main role was to induct the young men coming into prison. It was more pastoral than

teaching and I enjoyed it.

After some time gaining prison experience and working with prisoners, I applied for a fulltime role as a Restorative Justice Chaplain, running a prison course called SORI (Supporting Offenders through Restoration Inside). The course brought together perpetrators of crime and their victims. In one instance a young man convicted of murder met the deceased's mother. The eventual outcome was that the mother put her arms around the perpetrator and told him that she understood how he had come to kill her son. What she'd read in the papers hadn't been accurate, and the messy reality of the event was much different. This was a positive outcome to a voluntary mediation process and afterwards, they were able to support each other.

I'm now the Managing Chaplain at HMP Styal, a women's prison in the

heart of Cheshire. I think the complexity of needs for women are far greater than they are for men, but God's presence here is very real. God can walk through walls and he does. He is very much within the prison walls and within the women here.

Here at HMP Styal, there is often just a basic regime at Christmas due to a shortage of staff as we take time off to be with our families. In the run-up to Christmas, the women will spend their time making decorations out of old Christmas cards and we'll organise quizzes and games of bingo. We encourage those in self-catering houses to buy a chicken and vegetables and to cook a Christmas meal, and we'll allow others to eat their Christmas dinner out on the wing instead of alone in their cell.

I know that when women here hit rock bottom, they turn to God. They often use faith and the chapel as a safe place to go to help pass the time. If you come into a prison of 450 people and your experience of prison is based on what you've seen on TV, who do you trust or go to? The chaplaincy team offers pastoral support and we help to facilitate trusting friendships that will sustain the women through their sentence.

At Christmas time the church here is in many ways no different to the church on the outside. We hold regular Sunday services, we observe Advent, and on Christmas Day we will gather as a community to sing carols and read the lessons – just like any other parish.

For a lot of women, living away from children is the hardest thing to take – especially at Christmas time. The women don't receive presents, but they do have the opportunity to call home on Christmas Day resulting in 200 people clamouring to use one of the two phones available to them. The women will normally manage this for

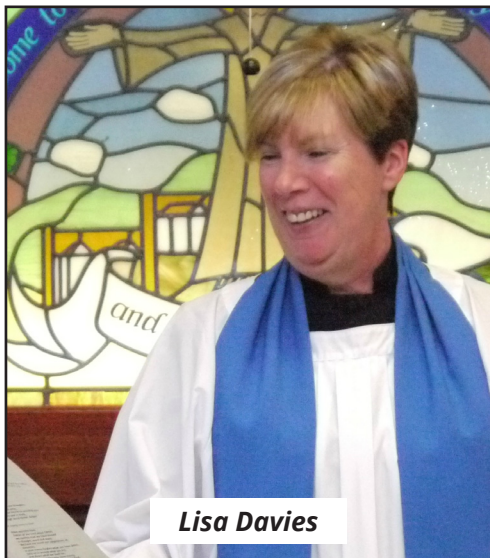
themselves, taking it in turns to call their loved ones. Some choose to ring for their children's sake; others choose not to call at all finding it too painful to hear everyone having fun and enjoying Christmas on the outside.

Research that I've carried out as part of my studies has shown that many women will defer their responsibilities for their children to God. They know that matters are out of their hands, but they can pray to God and trust that he will protect them in their absence.

Please pray for the prisoners of our diocese this Christmas and all those affected by the crimes that they've committed."

How you can help

Prison Fellowship is a Christian organisation that runs Angel Tree, a programme giving prisoners the opportunity to send a Christmas present to their children. To find out more and to donate to Prison Fellowship go to **prisonfellowship.org.uk**



Christmas cathedral attendance breaks records – again

Attendance at Christmas services in England's cathedrals has broken records for the second year running, statistics published by the Church of England have shown.

A total of 135,000 people came to Church of England cathedrals to worship on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day in 2017 – an increase of three per cent on the previous year, and the highest total since records began.

Attendance at Chester Cathedral for the season of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany rose by 35% from between 2014 – 2017 from 4600 people to 6200 people.

The Dean of Chester, the Very Revd Tim Stratford says:

"At Chester Cathedral this Christmas we will be celebrating the wonder and the joy of Jesus' birth and catching a glimpse of heaven. The church is a beautiful space filled with the prayers of people across a millennium. We will fill it with our own prayers, inspiring music, sculpture and art in worship and events that are open to the whole city and county."

Attendances at Sunday worship in cathedrals throughout the year also continued to hold steady over a five-year period, while average weekday attendances continued their pattern of increase, with just over 18,000 attending in 2017, compared with 7,000 in 2000 when this data was first recorded. Over 10 years, the total number attending all regular services in cathedrals has increased by 10 per cent.

While year-on-year changes to Advent and Christmas attendance can be affected by the number of Sundays in Advent and the day on which Christmas falls, numbers attending cathedrals on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day have



increased by 13 per cent over the past 10 years, evidencing sustained growth.

Meanwhile, more than 10 million people visited cathedrals (including Westminster Abbey) in 2017, with fewer paying for entry than in previous years.

Cathedrals also reported having around 1,000 more volunteers in 2017 compared with the previous year.

Cathedrals are increasingly used for an array of events, services and community engagement initiatives. In October, Chester Cathedral was the venue for the launch of Journey into Light an exhibition of prisoner artwork. An estimated 1000 people visited the exhibition hosted in the Chapter House of the Cathedral.

Nationally, Cathedrals continued to be centres of civic life, with 1.3 million people reported at 5,300 civic services and events. In 2017, 289,000 people attended 290 graduation ceremonies.

Chester Cathedral – Christmas services and events

The Christmas Tree Festival

1 December – 6 January

Join us for a delightful family event where, from the beginning of December, the cathedral cloisters will be filled with more than 50 majestic Christmas trees - in support of the Hospice of the Good Shepherd.

Advent Procession

2 December 6.30pm

A service from Darkness to Light for Hope

G4 Christmas

3 December 7.30pm

Operatic multi-platinum selling vocal quartet G4 bring their atmospheric Christmas tour to Chester. An intimate performance where Jonathan, Ben, Mike and Nick recall the musical experiences of their childhoods. Tickets £17.50 - £77.50

Chester Cathedral Choir presents 'Tidings of Joy'

8 & 15 December 7.30pm

The Chester Cathedral Choir sing a selection of traditional carols for all to enjoy. There will also be a chance for all to join in and sing carols.

Tickets £5 – £17.50

Carols for the City with Blessing of the Trees

16 December 3.30pm

Christmas Crackers

19 & 20 December 7.30pm

Carols and seasonal music from the Chester Music Society Choir and Chester Philharmonic Orchestra. Tickets £8 - £16

The Snowman

21 & 22 December

The world's most prolific performers of The Snowman film with live orchestra, Carrot Productions are delighted to return to Chester Cathedral with their enchanting Christmas show.

Tickets £12 – £28

Festival of Lessons and Carols for Christmas

23 December 6.30pm

Christmas Eve Services

Festival of Lessons and Carols for Christmas 3pm

Crib Service 5.30pm

Midnight Mass 11pm

Christmas Day Services

**Holy Communion with Carols
8am**

**Festival Eucharist with the
Bishop of Chester 10am**

Sung Eucharist, BCP 11.45am

Tickets are available
from the Cathedral
by calling 01244
500959 or by visiting
**[chestercathedral.com/
events](http://chestercathedral.com/events)**

Christmas Events

Room at the Inn

10 - 14 December 6.30pm – 8pm

A series of short services focusing on different aspects of the Christmas story with creative prayer and reflections.

Time for quiet reflection from 6.30pm

Service 7.30pm – 8pm

Refreshments to follow.

Journey to Bethlehem

15 December 4.30pm

Join us on this family friendly carol service, as we follow Mary and Joseph through the grounds of Foxhill on a candle-lit journey to Bethlehem. Free Mince pies and refreshments will be available after the service. Booking is essential.

Visit the Foxhill website for more details. foxhillchester.co.uk



The Diocese of Chester is pleased to be supporting #FollowTheStar, the national advent and Christmas campaign from the Church of England. The bishops of Chester, Birkenhead and Stockport have encouraged churches to take up the initiative, they say:

"We all know that people for whom church is perhaps unfamiliar, enjoy the sense of wonder and joy that Christmas brings. This resource captures that sense of expectation and possibility..."

Look out for the #FollowTheStar logo at your church and why not share your photos, videos and social media posts with the national church using the hashtag #FollowTheStar. We can all help to play our part in this collective worship around the country.



A Church Near You (ACNY) is a website that allows visitors to quickly find the nearest church to them with the features that they require. Looking for a church with a foodbank? Find it on ACNY. After your local Alpha course? Find it on ACNY. Want a church with beautiful stain glass windows for your wedding? ACNY is your go-to site.

Or how about Christmas...

Interestingly, statistics show that people use ACNY to find church services just before the big Christian festivals. In the 72 hours in the run-up to Christmas 2017, ACNY received a spike in visitors looking to attend their local church service at Christmas.

A Church Near You is an exciting evangelism opportunity – the vast majority of visitors to the website are new and the age split is exciting.

ACNY is free to every church in the Church of England. Please make sure your church listing is up to date for the online Christmas rush.