



The Joy of the Gospel

Wednesdays in Lent 7:00-8:30
p.m.

Space4 Hub, Newbottle Street.

Paula Gooder's book forms the basis of our Lent course this year at St Michael & All Angels'. The course is based on Pope Francis'

much acclaimed reflections 'Evangelii Gaudium' (meaning 'The Joy of the Gospel'). We hope this time together will allow us to draw on our Advent and Christmas reflections on Christian 'Joy' and how we share that with others through our words and actions. Our aim is to offer a positive and realistic approach to sharing our faith in world that often feels like it needs a bigger dose of joy!

All are welcome to join us, wherever we are on our faith journey. We may be exploring, be new to faith or we may have been part of church for many years – we think the course will work for all.

To find out more, give us a call in the parish office (0191 512 1769) on Tuesdays or Thursdays between 10 and 2 or email us on stmichaelshls@gmail.com. It's helpful for us to know numbers but also, just turn up if you want to, on Wednesday from 25th Feb to 25th Mar. We mean it when we say:

All are welcome

As we approach the beginning of Lent, we find ourselves entering a season that, I think, is often misunderstood. While many see Lent primarily as a time of "giving up" or solemnity, the church calendar offers it to us as something much more vital: a period of spiritual renewal, a chance to develop habits that help us grow as disciples of Christ, ultimately a chance to help us grow in our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This year, we want to develop and build on our Advent and Christmas focus on the meaning of 'Joy' in a world that often feels it could do with a bigger dose of joy! We also want to support people whether they are new to faith or have been members of the church for many years to develop a "rhythm of life." Just as the seasons of nature follow a pattern, our spiritual lives flourish when we commit to habits and patterns that draw us closer to God's saving love. To help us on our journey of faith, we're offering a variety of opportunities for everyone in our parish to explore, reflect, and grow.

Building on our reflections during Advent and Christmas, our Lent course this year is **"The Joy of the Gospel."** Based on Paula Gooder's book and the acclaimed reflections of Pope Francis in his publication '*Evangelii Gaudium*', we will explore how we might share our faith through both words and actions. In a world that often feels heavy, we want to offer a positive and realistic approach to Christian joy. The course is open to everyone—whether you are new to faith, just exploring, or have been a part of the church for many years. We will meet on **Wednesdays in Lent from 7:00–8:30 p.m. at the Space4 Hub on Newbottle Street** beginning of the 25th Feb for 5 weeks.

For daily reflection, we are recommending the book **"Draw Near: Life-Giving Habits for Lent."** This resource focuses on the "rhythm of life" that helps us grow day by day as we prepare for the mystery of Easter. If you would like a copy, please contact the Parish Office, and we can arrange to buy one for you (for the small cost of £3). I am delighted that our church children and families will be joining us in this journey with a parallel **40-day challenge**, exploring the life-giving habit of **generosity**. It is a wonderful way for our whole church family, young and old, to move together in faith.

Retreat Days at Brancepeth Castle: Sometimes, spiritual growth requires us to step away from the busyness of daily life. **Reverend Claire Cullingworth** is leading two retreat days at Brancepeth Castle as part of their 'Community of the Well' programme: **21st Feb:** "Finding God in Threads and Patches"; **21st March:** "Creative Prayer for Beginners". These retreat days are run by the Castle at a cost of £40 - you can find more information and book your place at <http://community-of-the-well.uk>. (Let us know in the office if we can help you in contacting them).

As we enter this holy season, my prayer is that we don't just "endure" Lent, but that we embrace it. May these coming weeks be a time where we all find ways to open our hearts to God's transformative love, to experience the Joy of the Gospel and to discover a rhythm that sustains us long after Easter Sunday has passed.

With my prayers and very best wishes.

