St Luke's News

December 2026
Number 292

Home Alone?



The 1990 Christmas film, *Home Alone*, about a young boy named Kevin McCallister (played by Macaulay Culkin) has become a much-loved modern festive classic. So far the franchise has spawned five sequels across a period of three decades.

For those who need a quick reminder, Kevin is accidentally left behind at the age of 8 when the family takes a holiday. He ends up defending his home from burglars in the most ingenious and slapstick manner, using every toy and household item he can lay his hands on.

The film is well known for its humour and especially for the engaging connection between characters. But the manner by which this is achieved is interesting.

Several subtle Christian themes are woven into the film by the Christian director that help to give the film its emotional heart. Beyond the

obvious faith references of the outdoor nativity scene, the fact that Kevin seeks sanctuary in the local church as the choir sings 'O Holy Night', and the multiple prayers delivered on screen, there are also less obvious Christian references.

The scary neighbour, Old Man Marley, bears wounds on his hands, likened to stigmata, and during the pivotal conversation between him and Kevin in the church, both are heard expressing regrets and seeking forgiveness. Critically though, the memorable core of the film sees Kevin expend every effort to see off the 'Wet Bandits', using iced front steps, toy car trip hazards and swinging cans of paint. However, when his own efforts eventually fail, Marley steps in and selflessly rescues the boy with blows from his trusty shovel. It is a clear statement that rescue comes not through Kevin's own resourcefulness but through unexpected liberation.

As adverts and films fill our screens with portrayals of the perfect family Christmas, as shops fill with tinsel and familiar festive jingles, some of us may sense we are out of step with the rest of the world and find ourselves feeling home alone this Christmas. The intensity of focus on family, celebration and joy somehow amplifies the pain of grief, illness, depression, loss, loneliness or financial pressures, and indeed it is also right to spare a thought for those who do not even have a home to be alone in.

The practice of lament embedded in the Bible, found in *Psalms*, *Job*, and the book bearing its name — *Lamentations* — emphasise bringing raw heartbreak, confusion, anger and suffering directly to God rather than suppressing it. Lament involves sitting with those feelings, and far from being an expression of despair or unfaithfulness, it is an intentional act of faith that navigates pain while anchoring trust in God's character. It is also not something to be rushed, as *Psalm 55:17* says:

> "Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and He hears my voice."

Sitting with pain and holding it prayerfully before God enables Him to begin to slowly restore balance, and while healing may take time, a balanced understanding of continued blessing can break through. As *Lamentations 3:22-23* reminds us:

> "Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."

The Christmas message has much to speak into those moments of difficulty. The transforming presence of Jesus, God Himself, born as a human baby to live amongst mankind, can take the trajectory of our real lives on a similar story arc to Kevin in the film, on through lament towards a fresh sense of purpose, a renewed understanding of the love of those around us and of that which God Himself pours onto each of us.

Our prayer must be that as the message of Christ's coming is heard afresh, that God's presence will break into sorrow, that grief will be brought into the light, that fear might be transformed into trust, that loneliness might give way to communication, estrangement to reconciliation, and that ultimately grace and forgiveness might win through.

Home Alone, as with so many cherished Christmas films, deftly balances the heartache with the happiness, and in this reminds us to include Christ in our celebrations and of our urgent need for a Saviour in our sadness.

So whichever favourite Christmas films you watch this winter, may you enjoy reliving moments of hope, laughter and love, and may those qualities echo in your lived experience of Christmas as we pray that the miracle of Christ's presence among us, becomes again a tangible reality.

Neil Brookes
Youth Director and Ordinand

*Amongst all the celebratory services of Christmas, do join us at **7:00pm** on **Monday 21st December** for **The Longest Night Service**, that recognises the challenges many face at this time of year (see page 7).*



Prayer

FOCUS
Tuesdays 8:00pm every week by Zoom (details from the church office), apart from 2nd Tuesday in the month which is in person, in the Chapel

Prayer for Children & Youth
Thursdays 11:15am in the Chapel (during term time)

Hour of Prayer
Fridays 10:00-11:00am in the Chapel

Half-day of Prayer
One Saturday in the month 9:00am-12 noon in the Chapel (check Diary dates on p 9)

Christmas and New Year Services at St Luke's



Christmas Services
We invite everyone to join us at this special time of year. There is something for all ages as we draw near to Christmas.

The theme this year is *The Gift* and we trust we will receive afresh the most precious gift of all — Our Lord Jesus Christ — into our lives and enter into a relationship with God.

There is more information about our Christmas services and events on pages 7 and 8.

Services in the New Year
In the New Year, as in previous years, St Luke's is putting on a series of plays in the Sunday morning services at 10:30am. In 2027 the plays will be based on the *Parables of Jesus*.

In the evening Encounter services at 5:30pm, we will be looking at the *Worship of God*.

The topics each week are given on pages 5 and 6.

Revd Michael Norman
Vicar of St Luke's



Services at St Luke's Church

Sunday

8:00am Holy Communion Service

This is a said Communion and is held once a month in the Chapel at St Luke's. All are welcome.

10:30am Morning Worship/Holy Communion Service

This is our main morning service, and is currently available live-streamed on YouTube. All are welcome, and there are usually children's groups and a crèche for younger ones. The details in the calendar below may change.

5:30pm Encounter - Informal Evening Service

This service includes worship, a talk and opportunities to be prayed for.

Tuesday

10:00am Holy Communion Service

We also have a weekly Communion (or Service of the Word if the Vicar is unavailable) at 10:00am on Tuesdays. This is a lovely, reflective service with a couple of hymns, followed by community tea and coffee.

Plan for Sunday Services:

November	**8:00am**	**10:30am**	**5:30pm**
Sunday 29th Advent Sunday		Morning Worship *Blind Bartimaeus Mark 10:46-52*	Encounter with Holy Communion *Signs & wonders and boldness*
December	**8:00am**	**10:30am**	**Afternoon/Evening**
Sunday 6th		Family Communion *The Second Coming Mark 13:1-27*	Encounter, **5:30pm** *Trusting God for the outcome!*
Sunday 13th	Holy Communion	Morning Worship *Watchfulness Mark 13:28-36*	Family Carols around the Crib, **3:00pm** *Very child friendly* Carols around the Crib, **5:00pm** *Traditional carols*
Sunday 20th		Nativity Service *Young People's Takeover Service*	Service of Nine Lessons & Carols, **6:30pm**

Note: The forms of service and sermon titles may change.

December	**8:00am**		
Monday 21st		The Longest Night Service, **7:00pm** *A Christmas service of Hope and reflection*	
Thursday 24th Christmas Eve		Christingle, **4:30pm** Midnight Holy Communion, **11:30pm**	
Friday 25th Christmas Day		Holy Communion with Carols, **9:00am** Family All-age Worship with optional short Holy Communion, **10:30am**	
Sunday 27th		Family Communion, **10:30am**	
January	**8:00am**	**10:30am**	**5:30pm**
Sunday 3rd		Family Communion *Celebrating the truth about God*	Encounter *What is worship?*
Sunday 10th	Holy Communion	All-age Worship *The Good Samaritan* *Luke 10:29-37*	Encounter *Dethroning the gods (worship as sacrifice)*
Sunday 17th		Morning Worship *The workers in the vineyard* *Matthew 20:1-16*	Encounter with Holy Communion *A royal invitation (worship as obedience)*
Sunday 24th		Family Communion *The bags of gold* *Matthew 25:14-30*	Encounter *Wired for worship (worshipping the Father)*
Sunday 31st		Morning Worship *The unmerciful servant* *Matthew 18:23-35*	Encounter with Holy Communion *Worshipping in Spirit and truth*
February	**8:00am**	**10:30am**	**5:30pm**
Sunday 7th		All-age Worship *The prodigal son* *Luke 15:11-32*	Encounter with Holy Communion *Use of liturgy and creativity in worship*

Note: The forms of service and sermon titles may change.

The Longest Night Service



A Christmas Service of Hope and Reflection

Have you had a difficult year? Or even years? Not looking forward to Christmas? Well, this new Christmas service at St Luke's may be for you.

Many people in our church, on our estate and around Watford don't look forward to Christmas. It can be a difficult time for many reasons.

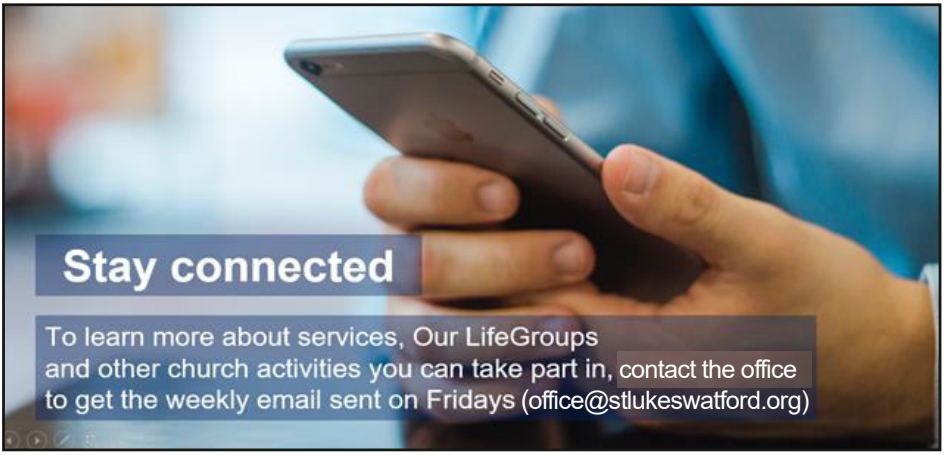
Together with churches around the UK, St Luke's is introducing a reflective service called *The Longest Night Service* on **Monday 21st December** at **7:00pm**. We pray that it will be a service filled with quiet reflection and Christian Hope.

The service will be about 45–50 minutes. Candles will be lit to offer to God this time of reflection and the gentle, prayerful, peaceful atmosphere of the service will enable those of us who are struggling, to offer our feelings and life situation to God.

The service will be followed by refreshments.

As you read this, if you think it applies to you, and perhaps your family too, please join us.

Revd Michael Norman
Vicar of St Luke's





Sunday 13th December

Family Carols around the Crib 3pm
with hot chocolate & marshmallows (*very child friendly*)

Carols around the crib 5pm
with traditional carols, mince pies and drinks.

Thursday 17th December

Carols at the Essex Arms 7pm

Sunday 20th December

Nativity Service 10.30am
Young people's Takeover Service

Nine Lessons & Carols Service 6.30pm

Monday 21st December

'The Longest Night' Service 7pm
A Christmas Service of Hope & Reflection

FYI
most church services last around an hour

Advent candle lighting
Sunday mornings 10.30am

Christmas Eve

Christingle 4.30pm

Midnight Holy Communion 11.30pm

Christmas Day

Holy Communion with Carols 9am

Family All age Service 10.30am
Ending with shortened Holy Communion

www.stlukeswatford.org/christmas

Any questions: **01923 246161** or **office@stlukeswatford.org**

Diary dates coming up

November	
27th	Friday Club Tea Party, 2:30pm
28th	Breakfast Club (see p 18)
December	
4th	Santa's Hampers packing (see p 12)
5th	Half-day of Prayer, St Luke's Chapel, 9:00am–12 noon
12th	Breakfast Club (see p 18)
	Live at St Luke's (see p 18)
17th	Carols at The Essex Arms, 7:00pm
18th	Friday Club Tea Party, 2:30pm
	Holiday Club Short: Christmas Party (see p 14; book in advance)
19th	Film Night: *It's a Wonderful Life*, 7:00pm
21st	Knitting Group (see p 18)
January	
9th	Breakfast Club (see p 18)
13th	Alpha Course starts (see p 11)
16th	Creative Space (see p 37)
18th	Knitting Group (see p 18)
23rd	Breakfast Club (see p 18)
24th	Sunday afternoon recital by Jachana Piano Trio, 3:00pm, to include works by Amy Beach and Bedřich Smetana (Free entry, donations welcome. Tea and coffee afterwards)
29th	Friday Club Tea Party, 2:30pm
February	
4th	Reset: New Wine Women's Day (see p 15)
10th	Ash Wednesday Holy Communion (Time tba)
13th	Breakfast Club (see p 18)
	Creative Space (see p 37)
22nd	Knitting Group (see p 18)
26th	Friday Club Tea Party, 2:30pm
27th	Alpha Course Away Day (see p 11)

Regular groups at St Luke's Church

Children/Youth Groups (evenings, term-time)

Kids Club	Tuesdays	5:30–6:45pm	4–11 year olds
Rock Solid	Mondays	6:30–7:45pm	Years 7–9
Base	Tuesdays	6:30–7:45pm	Years 9–11
K2	Tuesdays	8:00–9:15pm	Years 11–13

Badminton and Table Tennis Club
Friday evenings (except 2 weeks at Christmas and Good Friday), 7:30–10:30pm, in the Church Hall and Gathering Area
For more information, speak to Fiona Craigie

Breakfast Club
2nd and 4th Saturdays each month, 8:30–10:00am
For more information, speak to Bekki Hadley

Cassiobury and nearby Community Choir (CanCC)
Wednesday evenings, term-time, 7:30pm in the Church
For more information, speak to Pam Norman or Jeremy Cooke

Creative Space
Craft activities for women, monthly
For more information, speak to Pam Norman

Friday Club
Monthly, last Friday in the month (except in December when it will be on 18th)
For more information, speak to Janet G

Knitting Group
Monthly on a Monday morning
For more information, contact Di via the church office

Prayer
FOCUS, Tuesdays, 8:00pm: every week by Zoom (for login details contact the church office), apart from 2nd Tuesday in the month which is in person, in the Chapel
Prayer for Children & Youth, Thursdays, 11.15am, term-time, in the Chapel
Hour of Prayer, Fridays, 10:00-11:00 am, in the Chapel
Half-day of Prayer, Usually 1st Saturday in the month, 9:00am-12 noon, in the Chapel but check the *Diary dates coming up* page or the weekly news sheet

Toddlers
Thursday mornings, term-time, 9:30–11:00am
For more information, speak to Bekki Hadley



An Invitation to Alpha 2027 in the New Year

Curious about faith? Is there more to life than this?

Got questions? Try Alpha — come and join us to ask those questions and explore your curiosity. Alpha is a safe space to ask questions and explore faith and what it means to be a Christian.

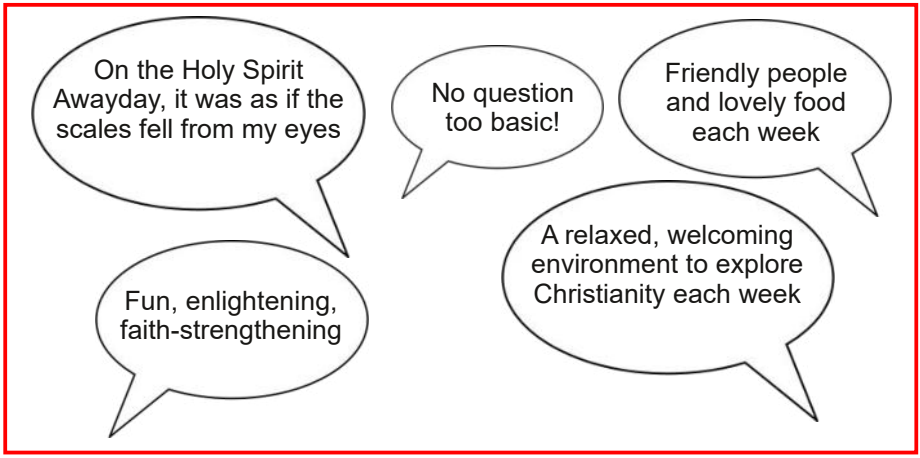
At each Alpha session we enjoy a meal together and then watch a video presentation on a different question of faith. Afterwards, we split into small discussion groups where you have a chance to share your thoughts and hear what others think. There is no question too simple or complicated to ask!

Where: St Luke's Church Lounge
When: Wednesdays from 7:30pm until 9:30pm
Start date: 13 January (for nine sessions)

What are the topics?
Week 1: *Who Is Jesus?* (13 January)
Week 2: *Why Did Jesus Die?* (20 January)
Week 3: *How Can I Have Faith?* (27 January)
Week 4: *Why and How Do I Pray?* (3 February)
Week 5: *Why and How Should I Read the Bible?* (10 February)
There is no meeting on 17 February as it's half-term week
Week 6: *How Does God Guide Us?* (24 February)
Week 7: *How Can I Resist Evil?* (3 March)
Week 8: *Why and How Should I Tell Others?* (10 March)
Week 9: *What about the Church?* (17 March)

In addition, there will be an Alpha 'Awayday' at Christ Church Chorleywood on Saturday 27 February where we will explore the person and work of God the Holy Spirit.

Some of the feedback received from the Autumn 2025 Alpha course is given on the next page.



Feedback from the Alpha course in Autumn 2025

To find out more, please check out the St Luke's website: https://www.stlukeswatford.org/alpha-course/ or scan the QR code on page 11. To book your place contact the church office (email office@stlukeswatford.org or phone 01923 246161).

We hope to see you soon!

The Alpha Team

Santa's Hampers 2026



The team are working hard to shop and put together 50 gift bags (not boxes this year) for families connected with the Watford & Three Rivers Refugee Partnership.

We will be including a few small luxury items, toys, toiletries, etc. and anticipate each bag will cost approximately £35. We would be very grateful for any contributions to the costs of these gifts via the Church office or in the Sunday collection, in an envelope clearly marked *Santa's Hampers*.

We will be meeting in the upstairs lounge at St Luke's on Friday 4th December at 10:00am to set everything out on tables, and at 6:00pm until approximately 8:00pm to pack the bags with the help of the youth. If you can help at either of these times please join us on the day. The team would be so thankful.

Santa's Hampers Team

Angels and Saints at St Luke's



Good people: where are they all?

The national news is full of stories of killing, rape, war, and fearful warnings of awful things to come, and you might be forgiven for thinking there are no good people left.

Luckily they're still here — but rarely feature in the news. According to our Vicar, Michael Norman, St Luke's has around 100 'saints' — good people who volunteer their time to keep the church running smoothly.

You'll find them everywhere. At church services about 25 of them will be helping — doing such things as playing music, preparing the communion table, leading intercessionary prayers, giving a reading, helping to teach children and young people about Jesus, taking the offering, broadcasting the service online, and sometimes leading the service itself. And we mustn't forget the welcomers and those who brew the coffee afterwards!

Many of the people who come to St Luke's don't go to Sunday services at all. During the week the church becomes a community hub with many parts — a learning centre, coffee shop, children's nursery, breakfast venue, concert hall, sports facility and more. We charge for our facilities, but it's the volunteers who often do the catering, make sure meeting rooms are ready and the bills get paid.

So where do our volunteers come from?
Michael sees the life of a church volunteer as a series of circles. "At one time they may be on an outer circle, where they are involved in a busy family life with little time to spare, but later, when perhaps they retire or children grow up, and they have more free time, they move to an inner circle and are able to volunteer more often."

Our 100 'saints' are drawn from the 170 people on the St Luke's electoral roll, all of whom are entitled to vote people (mostly volunteers) onto the Parochial Church Council, and most of whom attend Sunday services. "Not all at once," says Michael. "Some of them come every week but many come perhaps twice a month."

Now, what about the angels?
"There is a group of about 25 who I call my 'angels' because they have

been around long enough to know what they are doing and they generally say 'yes' when I ask them to help," says Michael. Many of the angels are multi-taskers. "For example, one angel I can think of, belongs to the choir, caters for the breakfast club, helps with children's work in the summer, takes Sunday School and looks after the church garden."

And some of our volunteers don't stop at St Luke's. Some are also helpers at the Watford Refugee Partnership, the YMCA, the Watford Foodbank, the New Hope shop, Watford Town Centre Chaplaincy Street Angels, Hospital Chaplaincy and uniformed organisations — Scouts, Brownies and Beavers.

Is it easy to become a volunteer?
Yes. The church office is a good starting point. Besides your contact details, most roles require that you complete the Church of England's Basic Safeguarding training course online. Roles where you're helping children, young people or vulnerable adults, involve applying for a DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) so that we know you don't have a criminal record. There is also further online training for these volunteers. It sounds complicated, but it isn't, and we have people who help with this.

One last word from Michael: "My grateful thanks to all who give their time to help with the Lord's work at St Luke's. Every bit of their output is vital to keep the mission of the church going in this community."

So, the answer to my question at the beginning is: Yes, there are lots of good people about — thank the Lord.

Chris Webb



Reset: New Wine Women's Day

A day to pause, worship and be renewed!



Calling all women!

Several St Luke's members are attending this event in the New Year on **6th February**. After having had a very positive experience last year we would love it if you join us.

The following is taken from the New Wine website and will give you a good idea about what the event is all about:

> *Life can feel full. Between work, family, church, friendships and all the everyday things that need our attention, it's easy to keep going without stopping to ask how our hearts are really doing.*
>
> ***New Wine Reset** is a day for women to step out of the busyness, make space for God and be reminded that we don't have to do it all in our own strength.*
>
> *Come and join us for a day of worship, teaching, prayer, encouragement and connection with other women. Whether you're feeling full of faith, running on empty, somewhere in between, or simply longing for some time with God, Reset is a chance to stop, breathe and refocus.*

Last year those of us who attended found the teaching and worship inspirational and encouraging. There was also plenty of time for fellowship and getting to know each other better.

The Reset event is held at locations all around the country and we are planning to attend the one at St Paul's Ealing (Ridley Avenue, London, W13 9XW). Below is some further information about what the day will entail:

> *Our theme this year is **Anointed**. Rooted in Isaiah 61:1-3 and Psalm 133, we'll explore what it means to be filled, empowered, and sent by God.*
>
> *Together, we'll seek the anointing Isaiah describes, receiving afresh from the Holy Spirit and being released to bring good news, proclaim*

freedom, bind up broken hearts, comfort those who mourn, and declare the goodness of God.

Come expectant to receive His joy, His presence, and a fresh commissioning for the season ahead. As we gather, our prayer is that every woman will leave refreshed, equipped, and empowered to live out God's purposes wherever He has placed her.

If you would like to attend please visit https://nwln.churchsuite.com/events/pdira6vy to book your ticket priced at £25. If you would like more information about the day then please speak to me or any of the women who attended last year.

Booking quickly is recommended as tickets will sell out!

Helen J Booth

Spirit in Sculpture at Ripon Cathedral



Close-up of the atom and cross suspended over the altar

In September, Alan and I visited Ripon Cathedral and were 'blown away' by the beauty and simplicity of a contemporary art installation in a chapel of prayer. A striking three-piece gold sculpture, it was created by silversmith Leslie Durbin in 1970 to symbolise God as Holy Spirit: life-giving, transforming, empowering.

Cathedral literature describes it as God's Spirit at the moment of Creation depicted by a model of an atom hanging in mid-air. Below it, descends God's Spirit in Jesus symbolised by a three-dimensional cross suspended over the altar. At the entrance to the chapel is a screen on which flames and flashes of lightning represent the Holy Spirit inspiring the first Christians at the Festival of Pentecost to risk persecution and death to share the good news of Jesus.



The screen

Yvonne Wilder

Safeguarding Sunday 2026: Love Protects



Sunday 15th November was observed as Safeguarding Sunday by thousands of churches around the UK. Organised by Thirtyone:Eight, an independent Christian charity, this year's theme was *Love protects* based on verses in *1 Corinthians 13*. We were reminded that safeguarding isn't bureaucracy, policy and compliance but an expression of Christian love in action.

This is the prayer written for this year's Safeguarding Sunday.

God of love, who loved us first,
and who in Jesus, showed us how to love others,
forgive us for the times we've looked away,
or stayed silent when we should have spoken up.
Teach us to love as you love.

God of compassion, who sees the overlooked,
and draws near the hurting and exploited,
help us to see with your eyes,
listen with your ears,
and give us courage to stand with those who are not heard.
Teach us to love as you love.

God of truth, who shines light into darkness
who reveals what is hidden and unspoken,
free us from our shame, our denial, and fear,
lead us in the way of honesty, openness and healing.
Teach us to love as you love.

God of protection, our place of safety and refuge,
may your Church be a place where:
- *— power is used to serve,*
- *— people find belonging,*
- *— and love is made real in what we say and do.*

Teach us to love as you love, with love that protects, always.
Amen.

Mary Bowen
Safeguarding Officer


YRS 7-13
LIVE AT ST LUKES
FREE LIVE MUSIC EVENT: 12TH DEC 7PM
FEATURING THREE LOCAL BANDS
OPEN TO ALL SECONDARY PUPILS
- NO TICKET REQURED
COST PRICE CAFE - NO ALCOHOL


St Luke's Church Watford
Knitting Club
2027 Meeting Dates
10am-12 noon
£2 donation per session attended
January 18th
February 22nd
March 15th
April 19th
May 17th
June 21st
July 19th
August 16th
September 20th
October 18th
November 15th
December 20th
All are welcome
Come along, knit, chat and
be part of our friendly group.


RISE & SHINE! IT'S
Breakfast Club
ST LUKE'S WATFORD
A tasty breakfast and fun activities for families, ages 0-11
Saturday Mornings
2nd and 4th Saturdays of the month
8.30 to 10am
Click here for dates

What's Going on in the Kitchen?



"Is that gas I can smell?" thought St Luke's Administrator, Sally, as she walked along the corridor past the kitchen to check that the heating was on in the chapel.

It was 5th November and fortunately there was a gas engineer 'in the house' that day as he'd come to fix a fault on the boiler and free up the radiator thermostats in the church office.

The engineer came to investigate the smell and said, "I can't smell anything but I've got a blocked nose." He went to his van to find his gas detection equipment and when he held the detector up to the vents in the corridor ceiling it "went crazy", Sally said. She felt vindicated. The engineer said he would try to isolate the cooker otherwise he would have to turn *everything* off!

Fortunately, he was able to isolate the cooker so there is heating throughout the building but no cooker.

What followed was a flurry of phone calls to various building users who might need the services of the cooker. Breakfast Club went continental, June baked the spuds for the Tearfund *Big Quiz Night* at home, the 'eat well, eat healthy' cookery class cancelled their session, party bookings had pizzas delivered, the Church family lunch and Christmas wine-tasting event were postponed and there was consternation in the Vicarage as to how they would cook their dinner on Christmas Day.



Quotes for repairs have been obtained and since the job involves gas pipes, it is a two-man job. The repair, which involves accessing the pipework in the kitchen ceiling, is booked in for Friday 4th December.

Sally hopes the engineers won't find that the job is more difficult than expected. As long as all goes to plan, the cooker should soon be back in action and the Vicarage can rest easy in the knowledge that their Christmas dinner is safe.

Yvonne Wilder

Update from the Gelsthorpe family in northern Japan



"Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations."
Psalm 90:1

Thank you so much for praying for our time visiting churches and supporters in the UK. We continue to be encouraged by the generous support of everyone.

Returning to Japan
Thank you for praying for our return to Japan. We arrived as planned on the 25th September and we are temporarily living in the apartment above the church. **Praise God** that we have found a suitable car to buy from a church member and we are currently doing the paperwork. **Please pray** for good meetings with church members, the church Advisory Board and the staff team as we hear about what's been happening in our absence and plan for the next term.

Encouragements from our time away
Praise God for the many encouragements at the church during our time away in the UK. **Praise God** that the church Advisory Board, service leaders and others have taken on many new responsibilities and seem happy to carry on with many of them.

Mrs Rivercrossing was baptised with her daughter a few years ago at our church but had walked away from her faith. **Praise God** that she has had a change of heart and has been doing Bible study with her daughter and her mother. **Please pray** for a growing faith for all of them.



Sunday Service outside in the local park

Praise God that, every week, several of the congregation are memorising a couple of verses of scripture. One of the regular ladies is leading us in a time of reciting the verses each week after our services. **Please pray** for a growing love for the Bible among all of us.

Praise God that numbers in the English classes have increased

and several new people want to do one-on-one classes with more Bible study. **Please pray** for open hearts to hear the Gospel and for wisdom for us as a staff team for how many one-to-one classes we can realistically start.

Challenges from our time away
Mr Middle-village is one of the Advisory Board members but has always struggled to come to meetings because of his busy work schedule. Because of this he is planning to step down from all church responsibilities. **Please pray** that this will be an opportunity for him to concentrate on growing in his own faith and please pray that we can engage with him wisely in this.

Mr Longbridge is another Advisory Board member who has been preaching once a month. He is very enthusiastic but sometimes struggles with the topic in his sermons. **Please pray** that we can find a good preaching training course to attend as Advisory Board members and that he will grow in his gift of preaching.

Relationships between some of the church ladies remain strained. **Please pray** for forgiveness and grace where feelings have been hurt and wisdom for us in deciding when something needs to be said in these situations.

Discussions about church leadership
We are planning to propose changes to our church leadership structure so that the structure is more Biblical, creates a good vision for the church as it grows and so that we can address some concerns that have been raised. **Please pray** for Mark as he looks at the Bible with the Advisory Board in the next couple of months and gets their feedback on our proposals. **Please pray** that we will honour God's vision for the church, that people will feel that their voices are heard and that they can get involved in a way that is manageable and uses their gifts.



Praise God for Caleb's two-week break with us in Japan in October

Family
Praise God that Caleb had a good half-term in Hebron and enjoyed a big role in the play in *Drama Week* in October. Please pray for wisdom for all of us as we decide whether he will continue at Hebron into A-Levels. **Praise God** for a good start for Isaac at Nottingham University. **Please pray** for good fellowship and witness for him among his fellow

students. This is now Grace's final year in Southampton. **Please pray** for wisdom for her in what to do next.

Please pray that a difficult situation with a previous landlord will be resolved swiftly.

Thank you so much for praying for us.

With love from
Mark, Sarah, Grace, Isaac and Caleb
Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF) Japan

SIM By Prayer

Ruth Guinness
Malawi
www.sim.org
+265 984 425 575

Dear friends,

Warm greetings from Malawi! We had some unusually early rain in September. It's amazing how quickly things turn green. But the temperature has risen again since then, and it's been dry. People have prepared fields for planting and are now waiting for the beginning of the rainy season. I'm glad to have had two nights away at the beginning of this week as a much-needed mini break.

In September I wrote about going round different Africa Evangelical Church (AEC) congregations in Blantyre. Subsequently, we started two groups with lay leaders from these churches, studying *The Story of God and His World*. It was an introductory meeting to explain how the course works and to introduce the study material.

Unfortunately, not every church was able to send someone, partly because of challenges with transport. Malawi is in the middle of another fuel crisis, and local transport has at least doubled in cost. I live quite near to a petrol station, and sometimes the queue (waiting hopefully for fuel to come) goes well past my house and blocks a main road. When fuel arrives, it can be very noisy and chaotic. I have half a tank which I will use sparingly.



Bangwe Africa Evangelical Church, Blantyre



EBCoM students in class

The group of students from the Evangelical Bible College of Malawi (EBCoM) which met to go through *The Story of God and His World* has just finished. It ended well, though during the course I was disappointed that several students did not put in the work that they needed to do in order to really benefit from the course. Still, one student who had been instrumental in telling other students about the course, and has now done it twice, is very enthusiastic. He says that it has helped him to prepare for preaching, because he is more able to see where the passage fits in the overall story of the Bible.

The Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA) is planning to hold a workshop in Kenya in December, revising their standards for theological education. I will now go to that on my way back to the UK for Christmas and home assignment. In the meantime, there is quite a lot of work to do to prepare for it.

Yesterday I hosted the SIM prayer meeting in my house. Sadly, it was the last one for Megumi and Helen Fazakerley who will be moving back to the UK on Saturday. They are the last remaining people in SIM Malawi who were with SIM Malawi when I arrived, so it feels like the end of an era!

Prayer points

- Give thanks for the EBCoM students who finished studying *The Story of God and His World*
- Give thanks that with good physio and lots of exercises, my frozen shoulder has improved far more quickly than the physio expected
- Pray for Malawi, where economic challenges have led to fuel shortages which have a knock-on effect on everything else
- Pray for the AEC lay leaders who will be studying *The Story of God and His World* for the next 6 weeks
- Pray for ACTEA and those involved in revising their Standards and preparing for the workshop.

Thank you so much for your prayerful support.

With love in Christ,

Ruth Guinness
ruth.guinness@sim.org
Serving in Mission (SIM)
P.O. Box 136 Blantyre, Malawi

News from Clive and Andrea



Dear friends,

Greetings from a cool Nepal!

We arrived safely in Nepal in mid-September, not long before Nepal was subject to several days of heavy rain caused by a cyclone from the Bay of Bengal. This was followed by further heavy rainstorms and another flash-flood that destroyed 35 homes and 4 bridges.

As you might imagine, none of this helped the ongoing relief effort following the devastating floods in August. According to reports, the death toll stands at 1,455 with over 5,700 missing — about 85,000 people have been affected. There were also reports of illness within the temporary camps, as well as concerns that vulnerable individuals, eg those with disabilities, were being overlooked. Please pray that ALL who are in need will be provided for... equally.

The International Nepal Fellowship (INF) joined with other organisations to provide relief in the immediate aftermath, including emergency supplies, medical assessment and treatment. Working with the Nepali Government, INF has initiated a 3-phase plan: **1.** Emergency Response: life-saving support (1–3 months), **2.** Early recovery: restoration (3–12 months), **3.** Recovery and resilience: long-term adaptation (12+ months).

INF now has a base in the disaster area with 8 staff to carry out the next steps. Clive is visiting the area 22nd–25th November to do photography and training in ethical storytelling and we will share more in the next magazine. However, you can always check the INF Facebook page for brief updates. Please pray for the successful implementation of the recovery initiatives and, especially, that in the midst of all the suffering, the love of Christ will touch people's lives in unexpected ways.

We have both been busy with our various INF commitments and value being able to work with colleagues in person. It has also been a privilege to participate in online meetings with All Nations regarding the education strategy for the future. Exciting times!

Please pray for All Nations as it settles into its new home: Chester House, Muswell Hill. We were pleased to be able to join the first ever staff meeting at the new site the day before we flew to Nepal. The location is more challenging to get to but it's a great site for the students. Please pray for

staff and students as they get to grips with new rhythms and routines.

Andrea has 11 students from the UK, Netherlands, France, Switzerland, South Korea and Australia on the online *Explore* course she runs; it's an honour to be part of their journey of faith. Please pray that this will be a good learning experience but, most importantly, an opportunity for them to deepen their faith and understanding of God's purposes for them.

Thank you, as always, for your love and support and for praying for Nepal.

God bless,

Clive and Andrea



Can you make a difference this Christmas by helping to give some kindness, generosity and hope?

In December, Watford Foodbank expects to support hundreds of individuals and families who are struggling financially and find this time of year particularly difficult. Your kind gift could be the life-changing difference between hardship and hope for local families. We aim to raise £20,000 across this appeal which will run from 1st-31st December. *Please click on the QR Code below to donate, or visit our website:* watford.foodbank.org.uk.

£5 Means we can welcome people with a cup of tea and a biscuit when they come to collect their food parcels.

£25 Helps us provide a single person with an emergency food parcel.

£75 Helps with our running costs, such as purchasing stock when we're short, or putting fuel in our vans which enables us to collect donations, distribute to our centres, and deliver food parcels to our clients.

Watford Foodbank
Together with Trussell

YMCA Here for young people Here for communities Here for you

YMCA Chiltern Group 140th Anniversary Thanksgiving

A special service of thanksgiving was held at St Mary's church on 12th October to celebrate 140 years of YMCA activity in our area. The Watford & District YMCA was founded in 1886, with the first meeting taking place in a coffee shop in Watford High Street on the 12th October of that year. All YMCA centres across Herts, Beds, Bucks and Oxfordshire have recently been brought into one organisation, forming the largest YMCA group in England and Wales, and consequently have changed their name from 'One YMCA' to 'YMCA Chiltern Group'.

Founded in order to offer prayer and spiritual guidance to the young men of Watford, the organisation's services have expanded and developed as the needs of the local community have changed. Among the services now offered to young people and families are emergency accommodation, support for domestic and sexual abuse victims, mental health and debt counselling, support for children with special educational needs, and nursery and family centres. At the heart of all that the YMCA does is the same Christian mission that motivated its founders in 1886, and its team of chaplains, both full-time and volunteers, is central to the care and support that is offered to all.

Guests at the celebration were welcomed by the Rt Revd Richard Atkinson OBE, Bishop of Bedford, who is Chair of the Trustees, and the keynote speaker was Dr David Newman from Lebanon YMCA in Ohio, USA, who explained how a farmer's son from Somerset, George Williams, established the YMCA in London in 1844 in order to take the Gospel to the young men of the city, and how that work had now grown into a worldwide movement. Dr Newman challenged us from *Matthew 5:11-14*, to let our lights shine in the darkness, like a city on a hill, so that all in our community can see and experience Christ's love.



Lord-Lieutenant of Hertfordshire, Robert Voss CBE CStJ, presents Paul with a special service award for his work as a volunteer chaplain

As part of the celebration two volunteer chaplains were presented with special awards for their service, including our very own Paul Rogers, who has faithfully served as a volunteer chaplain at

Charter House for the past nine years, a hostel for more than 160 people. Congratulations Paul! Volunteers are the lifeblood of the YMCA, and if anyone is interested in getting involved, I am sure Paul would be only too happy to talk to you about it.

The cross on the top of the YMCA Charter House hostel building was the highest point in our town when built in 1977 but illuminated at night it still stands as a symbol of the Christian faith on which the YMCA was founded. Let us pray that the work will continue to thrive and prosper for the next 140 years!

Bill Miller
Chair, Partners in Mission

Update on the *Arise Africa* Campaign

The *Arise Africa* petition was handed into 10 Downing Street on 12th November, following three years of campaigning. Open Doors achieved its aim of 1 million global signatures (actually 1,046,378), 200,000 of which came from the UK, and over 100 from St Luke's Watford.

The aim of the *Arise Africa* campaign was to raise awareness of the plight of Christians in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Nigeria, the country with the largest population in Africa.

As an awareness-raising action on the day, I was asked to be part of an installation/silent demonstration on Parliament Square. This is what Open Doors said about this action:

"*On average, 12 Christians are killed every day in sub-Saharan Africa, and we want to make sure this figure is known. We have 12 stories of martyrs from across sub-Saharan Africa and will have 12 people who are willing to stand in Parliament Square holding a poster of a martyr's photo and story. Those 12*



Photo by permission of Open Doors UK & Ireland

The *Arise Africa* petition arriving at 10 Downing Street



Open Doors *Arise Africa* silent demonstration in Parliament Square on 12th November

will be joined by a 13th person holding a poster asking: "Who will be next?".

Here's the story of the man whose photo I was holding:

Luka Mashingil, Nigeria
On Christmas Eve 2024, Luke Mashingil was killed by radicalised Fulani militants. His widow Charity said:

"*They killed my husband and his brother while we ran to save our lives with my children. They burnt our house and now we have nowhere to stay.*"

Thank you to everyone at St Luke's who supported the campaign by signing the *Arise Africa* petition.

There is more information about the campaign at:

https://www.opendoorsuk.org/act/arise-africa/

John Williamson
Advocacy Rep, Open Doors



Nireekshana ACET (AIDS, action Care, Education & Training) in Hyderabad, India, provides compassionate, holistic, and evidence-based healthcare to individuals and families affected by HIV, leprosy and other chronic health conditions. By integrating clinical care, laboratory diagnostics, counselling, rehabilitation, research, and livelihood support, the organisation remains committed to not only treating disease but also to improving quality of life, promoting dignity and fostering healthier, more resilient communities.

Comprehensive clinical care

Between January and June 2026, 1,511 patients received care through the Hyderabad clinic. This included 908 people living with HIV, of whom 16 were newly registered, 483 persons affected by leprosy, including 52 new diagnoses, and 120 general medical patients.



Family counselling

Each patient benefits from a holistic model of care that combines medical consultation, laboratory investigations, counselling, health education, nutritional guidance, treatment monitoring and referral services where specialised care is required. This integrated approach enables patients and their families to receive comprehensive support throughout their healthcare journey.

Since its inception 22 years ago, Nireekshana ACET has registered 6,626 people living with HIV and their families, reflecting sustained commitment to comprehensive HIV care and family-centred support.

Expanding access to services through the Shamshabad Clinic

The newly established Shamshabad Clinic has begun extending quality healthcare services to underserved communities on the outskirts of Hyderabad. Between March and June 2026, the clinic was attended by 225 general patients, including an estimated 10–15 individuals living with HIV, who received clinical care, counselling, and follow-up support.

Although still in its early stages, the steady increase in patient attendance demonstrates the growing confidence of the surrounding communities and highlights the importance of decentralised healthcare services.



Diagnostic testing

Clinical laboratory services

Accurate laboratory diagnosis remains an essential component of holistic patient care. The clinical laboratory routinely performs approximately 25 different blood and plasma investigations that support the diagnosis and monitoring of HIV infection, leprosy, treatment-related complications, and other medical conditions.

Patients with abnormal laboratory results receive prompt medical review and appropriate intervention. Depending on the

clinical condition, treatment is initiated within the clinic or patients are referred to specialist centres for additional investigation and management. These services enable early detection of complications and support timely, evidence-based clinical decision-making.

Women's Empowerment Programme

The Women's Empowerment Programme continues to provide vocational training and livelihood opportunities for women from vulnerable backgrounds.



Women's Empowerment Programme

During the first six months of 2026, 12 women completed introductory training in sewing and tailoring. In addition to garment construction, the programme diversified into new livelihood activities by responding to local market demand and producing mango and gongura pickles.

Participants also continued manufacturing petroleum jelly-based skin care products and herbal pain relief oil, adding to the programme's growing portfolio of community-produced products.

Future efforts will focus on improving product quality, strengthening business skills, expanding market access, and creating sustainable income opportunities for women and their families.

Centre of Excellence for Leprosy Diagnosis

Nireekshana ACET continues to serve as a specialist referral centre for the diagnosis of difficult and atypical leprosy cases.

Peripheral nerve ultrasonography remains one of the clinic's most distinctive diagnostic services. This non-invasive technique greatly improves diagnostic accuracy and facilitates timely treatment before permanent disability develops.

Beyond direct patient care, Nireekshana ACET is committed to strengthening diagnostic capacity through professional training for clinicians, laboratory professionals and community health workers.

By sharing these specialist skills, the organisation is helping to improve early diagnosis and management of leprosy across multiple healthcare settings, contributing to disability prevention and better long-term outcomes.

Extracts from Nireekshana ACET Half-yearly Report, January-June 2026



St Luke's held its **Harvest Thanksgiving** on 4th October. The church was adorned with harvest flowers and displays – many thanks to Geoff, Marion and Wera. Youth Director, Neil, and Children & Families Team Leader, Bekki, inspired and encouraged us to rejoice and be thankful in all circumstances. Donations of food and toiletries were given to New Hope and Watford Foodbank. The service was followed by a very enjoyable Harvest Lunch. Thank you to the catering team.



Winnie Wu, classical pianist and teacher, gave a lovely **Sunday afternoon recita**l on 11th October which included works by Liszt, Ravel and transcriptions by Rachmaninov. What a treat.

As an alternative to Halloween, Bekki arranged a **Film Night** on 31st October. Everyone enjoyed watching one of Bekki's favourite films, *The Greatest Showman*.



Image by Macrovector on Magnific.com



The Uniformed organisations joined the congregation on **Remembrance Sunday** for the annual Act of Remembrance. The service titled 'Instead of you' ended with the congregation being invited to pin a red ribbon on a cross as an act of gratitude for those who have died in war fighting for current and future generations and for Jesus who died for mankind. After pinning the ribbon each person took a sticker with the words 'Instead of me' as a reminder that many have died in place of us, especially Jesus.



The annual **Christmas Pudding Evening** on 13th November saw over 50 puddings made this year. Families and friendship groups chatted as they mixed the ingredients, and the Christmas tunes and unveiling of Christmas jumpers seemed to mark the beginning of the Christmas period. Many thanks to everyone who helped on the evening, especially Beth, Fran and Lydia. The event raised £120 for the Watford Foodbank.

Kate Dorsett-Bailey

On 14th November, St Luke's joined some 500 churches around the UK for Tearfund's **The Big Quiz Night 2026**. The evening started with a lovely meal and time to chat and then the teams got down to the business of the quiz. It was hard fought but *Here for a laugh* managed to emerge the winners by the narrowest of margins — 1 point. As the Vicar observed the team was clearly not 'here for a laugh' but 'here to win'.



Winning team *Here for a laugh*

Just over £550 has been raised for Tearfund's *Transforming Communities* programme, helping local churches around the world lead their communities out of extreme poverty and into a sustainable future.

A big thank you to June and Sally for organising and running the quiz and to Jill and Elizabeth for helping with the catering.



Quiz masters and organisers, Sally and June



Catering team, Elizabeth and Jill, with their well-deserved medals

Harvest School Visit

We were delighted to welcome 90 Year 1 children from Cassiobury Infants School, along with their teachers, on 7th October to learn about Harvest.

The children visited in class groups of 30 and took part in interactive sessions exploring what Harvest means from a Christian perspective.



The Harvest of the Earth

During the visit, we looked at the importance of being thankful and explored three different harvest themes:

- The Harvest of the Sea, focusing on peace
- The Harvest of the Garden, focusing on patience
- The Harvest of the Earth, focusing on joy.

The children were divided into three groups and rotated around the three activity stations to learn about each theme. Each station included a Christian connection through a Bible story, helping the children discover more about God's love and Jesus's teaching.

These school visits are a wonderful way to strengthen our links with local schools and provide opportunities for children to learn more about Jesus in a fun and engaging way.

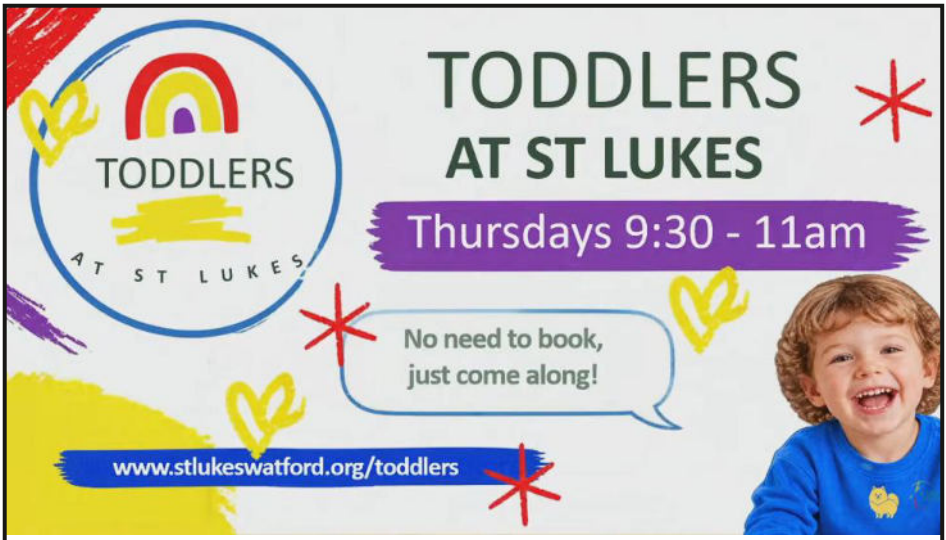
A big thank you to all the volunteers who helped make this school visit such a success. Your support was greatly appreciated.

Bekki Hadley
Children and Families Team Leader

If you would like to give to St Luke's by bank transfer, the details are:

Account name	PCC St Luke's Watford
Sort code	20-91-79
Account no.	70687472
Reference	Please state if the donation is for a specific appeal, eg Santa's hampers, Foodbank, etc.

Please remember to complete a Gift Aid form if you are a tax payer



From Birth to Pre-School
All Welcome!

For more information, scan the QR code or contact the church office (email office@stlukeswatford.org or phone 01923 246161)



Holiday Club Short: Light Party



On Friday 30th October, we held a Light Party for primary school-aged children. We decided to hold it the day before Halloween to encourage more children who do not come to church to join us, as they might otherwise be out trick-or-treating on 31st October.

We provided lots of fun activities, including games in the dark, age-appropriate Bible teaching about *Jesus the Light of the World* and worship songs.



Mary with the amazing candle cakes

After a tea of hot dogs or vegetarian sausages and candle cakes, the children were divided into small groups to enjoy more games, crafts linked to the Bible teaching, and a question time to explore the teaching in greater depth. They also completed an activity sheet connected with the Bible teaching and learned a memory verse.

A huge thank you to all the volunteers who helped make this event possible.

Our next Holiday Club Short will be the Christmas Party on Friday 18th December. You can book your place using the QR code in the advert on page 14.

Bekki Hadley
Children and Families Team Leader



Craft time

Healing the Family Tree Conference



The *Healing the Family Tree Conference* on Saturday 7th November was well attended by members of the St Luke's Church family and lots of guests from other churches in the area.

Healing the family tree is also known as *Generational healing* and was popularised in the 1980s by a Christian psychiatrist, Kenneth McCall. He discovered that unresolved deaths or traumas in a family's history can manifest as psychological or emotional disturbances in living descendants.

In Christian practice, healing the family tree involves prayer, repentance and spiritual intervention. It recognises that both blessings and negative patterns can be passed down through generations. Spiritual inheritance may include virtues from ancestors or the consequences of their sins.

The conference was led by Revd Canon Andrew Goodman who leads the Diocesan Healing and Deliverance Team.

Following tea and coffee, the conference kicked off with a welcome from the Rt Revd Richard Atkinson, the Bishop of Bedford. This was followed by a time of worship led by our own St Luke's worship team before we headed into the first session of teaching.

Andrew's teaching was fantastic and covered the Christian family tree, thinking about how sin entered the world right at the beginning caused by the actions of Adam and Eve and how it has been present throughout history. We were then reminded of the important victory won by Jesus on the cross, followed by the importance of forgiveness.

One of the key takeaways for me was that Andrew stressed the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation, which are two concepts that are often misunderstood. We were reminded that forgiveness is an internal, one-sided decision to release resentment and hand justice over to God. In contrast, reconciliation is a mutual, two-sided process of rebuilding trust and restoring a broken relationship. As Christians we are commanded to forgive, but reconciliation is conditional upon repentance, safety and rebuilt trust.

After a refreshment break, which included some delicious cakes and biscuits, we spent time in worship followed by prayer ministry and Holy

Communion. During the prayer ministry, delegates were invited to come forward and pray prayers of forgiveness, led by the prayer ministry team. As part of the prayer ministry team, I was very moved as people came forward and asked for prayer for the things that they and their families were dealing with. During Holy Communion prayer with anointing was offered to everyone.

The conference ended with time for fellowship while we ate lunch together.

I thought the conference was really beneficial to me, and I know that others in the church have said the same thing. Personally, my highlight has been speaking to others since the conference and hearing them say how much better it has made them feel.

Helen J Booth

CREATIVE SPACE FOR HARD-WORKING WOMEN

COME JOIN THE FUN!

Saturday 16th January, 9:30am-12 noon
Silk painting
£8 + donation for breakfast

Saturday 13th February, 10:00-11:30am
Informal Bring & Share Craft (Free)

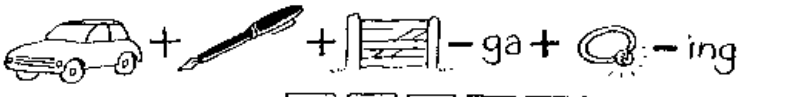
Saturday 6th March, 9:30am-12 noon
Iris folding
£8 + donation for breakfast

Payment is by cash only on the day

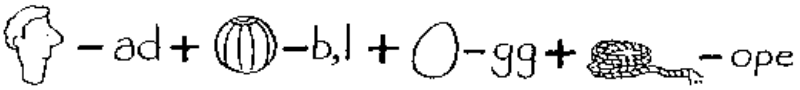
Contact Pam to book your place via the Creative Space Whatsapp or email (email the church office – office@stlukeswatford.org – for contact details)

Children's Page

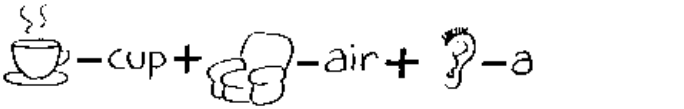
JESUS WAS A...



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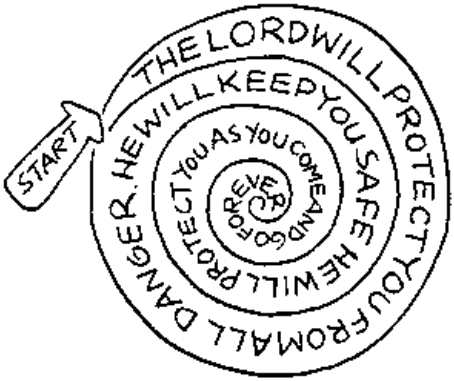
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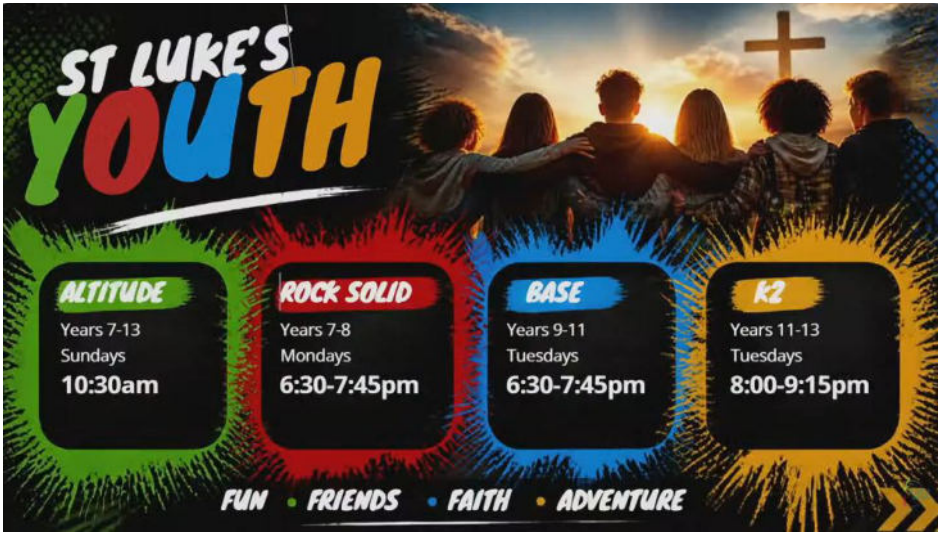
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DON'T be Afraid!

Do you ever feel frightened? In *Psalm 121*, verses 7 & 8, there are words to comfort you.




Ages 4 to 11
KIDS CLUB
Tuesdays during term time
5.30PM – 6.45PM


ST LUKE'S YOUTH
ALTITUDE
Years 7-13
Sundays
10:30am
ROCK SOLID
Years 7-8
Mondays
6:30-7:45pm
BASE
Years 9-11
Tuesdays
6:30-7:45pm
K2
Years 11-13
Tuesdays
8:00-9:15pm
FUN • FRIENDS • FAITH • ADVENTURE

You are welcome to submit an article for the next edition of *St Luke's News* which should be no more than 450 words. We may edit articles for clarity. The delivery date for contributions to the next issue is Monday 25th January.

Please email articles to the Church Office: office@stlukeswatford.org

If you wish to receive *St Luke's News* regularly, either delivered to your door or emailed, please contact the Church Office (01923 246161). Large print is also available. Alternatively, please let us know if you no longer wish to receive it.

The magazine appears on our website, www.stlukeswatford.org

Vicar	Michael Norman
Readers	Dave Clarke
	Pam Norman
	Simon Trundle
Ordinand and Youth Director	Neil Brookes
Music Director	Jeremy Cooke
Children & Families Team Leader	Bekki Hadley
Assistant Youth Director	Belle Fleming
Administrator	Sally Wood
Publicity Officer	John Williamson
Churchwardens	Terry Sullivan
	Debi King
PCC Lay Chair	Melanie Sills
PCC Treasurer	Vacancy
PCC Secretary	Pam Norman
Safeguarding Officer	Mary Bowen

Please leave a message for any of the above on the Church Office answerphone – 01923 246161

Website	www.stlukeswatford.org
Email	office@stlukeswatford.org