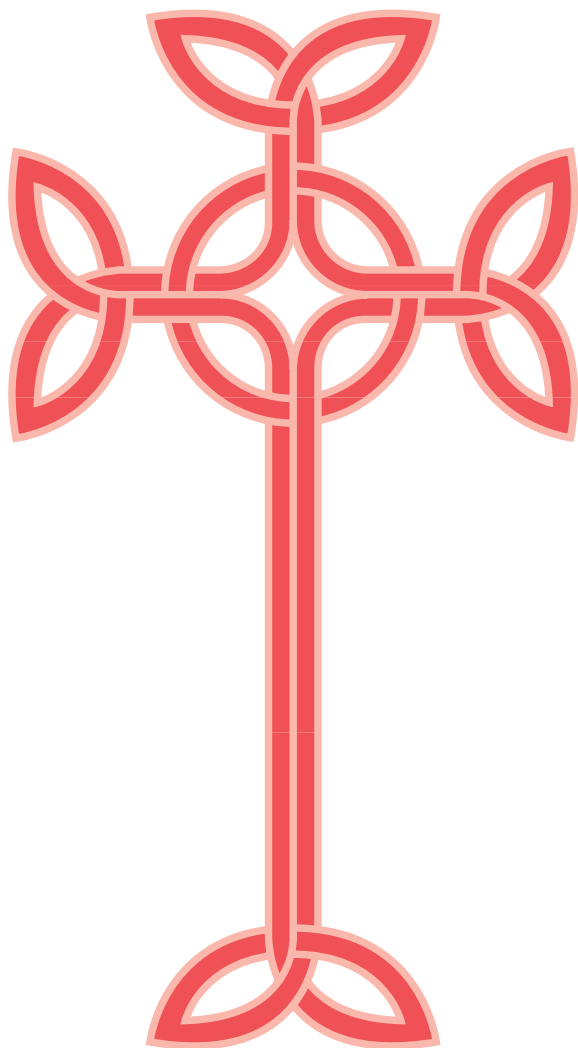


THE MONTHLY MAGAZINE
OF THE PARISH OF
HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING



St. Michael
AND ALL ANGELS

APRIL 2026

£1

SIGMPOST

THE PARISH CHURCH OF HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING

MINISTRY TEAM

Rector

Rev'd John Barron,
The Rectory, 5 Lingfield, Houghton-le-Spring,
Tyne & Wear, DH5 5QA.
Tel: (0191) 584 7657

We enjoy and benefit from the ministry of a number of retired clergy at St Michael's.

Readers

Susan Elsey (Reader)
Email: Suelsey2@gmail.com

Mrs. Ros Pickersgill (Reader)
Tel: (0191) 584 5642

Mrs. Anne Clappison (Reader)
Tel: (0191) 584 7533

Church Wardens

Mrs. Rita Turnbull
Tel: (0191) 584 1954

Mr. Alastair Bradley
Tel: (0191) 584 1455

Assistant Church Wardens

Mr. Simon Hardy
Tel: 07854 411884

Mr. Brian Scott
Tel: 07778 577898

Officers of the Parochial Church Council

Angela Slater (Secretary)
Tel: (0191) 584 2036

Mrs. Susan Bradley (Treasurer)
Tel: (0191) 584 1455

Organist & Director of Music

Mr. George Peebles
Tel: 07941 507724
Email: georgepeebles@talktalk.com

Verger

Mr. David Turnbull
Tel: (0191) 584 1954

Safeguarding

Alison Young (Safeguarding Officer)
Tel: 07532 036026

Mrs. Kathleen Close (DBS Officer)
Tel: (0191) 584 0353

Space4

76 Newbottle Street
Next to Houghton Library
Twitter @space4
Facebook houghtonspace4
Tel: (0191) 512 0676

Church Website

Our website contains information on most aspects of church life.
www.stmichaels-hls.org.uk

The Friends of Houghton Parish Church Trust

Contact: Mr. George Peebles, Membership
Secretary on 07941 507724
Email: georgepeebles@talktalk.com for information and application forms.

St Michaels and All Angels Mothers Union

The Mothers Union meets on the last Monday of every month at 2pm in the Kepier Hall.

We welcome new members with open arms and if you require any further information please contact:-

Joan Beattie Tel: (0191) 512 6032

Sheila Wynne Tel: 07916 629043

Anne Todd Tel: (0191) 584 1032

UNIFORMED ORGANISATIONS

Rainbows, Brownies, Guides and Rangers

Contact: Sheila Wynne, Tel: 07916629043

Beavers, Cubs and Scouts

Contact: Steve Gibson, Tel: 07507 161366
Website: www.1sthoughtonscouts.org.uk

REGULAR SERVICES

Our pattern of services at St Michael and All Angels over a 'normal' week:

Sun	8.30am	A shorter 'said' service of Communion.
Sun	10am	Parish Communion (a 'sung' service, with 'Young Church') (1st Sunday is 'All-age Communion').
Sun	6pm	Evening Service: 1st Sun 'Engage' – contemporary music & themed service; 2nd Sun 'Choral Evensong' – a traditional service led by our choir; 3rd Sun 'Service of Light' – a relaxed sung service; 4th Sun 'Celtic Eucharist' – 'Iona' style Communion.
Tues	7pm	Holy Communion (4th Sunday, during winter)
Thur	10am	Holy Communion with Hymns (& refreshments afterwards).

We hold a quieter service of Holy Communion on the 4th Tuesday of the month at 7pm. Our Young Church takes place during the 10am Sunday Holy Communion on the 2nd and 3rd Sunday of the month, with our All Age Service aim for the Young members of the congregation to be a part of on the 1st Sunday of the month.

Contact Information

Our website and Facebook page contain details of how to join others online for worship. We send regular updates via our church distribution list – please call us or email us if you know someone who would like to receive our email updates.

Find us online at:

website: www.stmichaels.hls.org.uk
 facebook: www.facebook.com/stmichaels.hls

The Parish Office is open between 9am & 3pm on a Tuesday and 9am & 2pm Thursday. You can contact us on Tel: (0191) 512 1769. On occasions, when we need to close the 'physical' office, you can contact us between these times on Mob: 07707 043 395. You can also contact us on email or message us during the week and we will respond during opening hours:

Email: stmichaels.hls@gmail.com
 Facebook: www.facebook.com/stmichaels.hls
 Website: www.stmichaels-hls.org.uk

For urgent issues contact Rev'd John Barron on (0191) 584 7657.

If you'd like your child to be a part of Young Church contact Clare our Young Church leader at stmichaels.youngchurch@btinternet.com

To make an appointment for 'Vestry hour' to book baptisms and weddings call the Church Office or email us. Vestry Hour usually takes place on a Monday between 6 – 7pm. You will be able to talk to the team about all your Wedding and Christening needs, whether that is booking dates, finding prices or finding out the process in more details.

ABOUT SIGNPOST

Signpost is the magazine of the Parish Church of St. Michael & All Angels Houghton-le-Spring. In addition to providing information about the life of the church, it also aims to reflect the interests of the broader community and to provide a source of local news and a forum in which matters of common concern can be raised. The Editors welcome comments and suggestions, and invite contributions. Items to be included in Signpost should be submitted to the Editors by 10th of the month (end of 1st week of the month for memorials) to ensure inclusion in the next issue. It should be noted, however, that the Editors cannot guarantee to publish material and wish to point out that items included do not necessarily reflect their views nor those of the Parochial Church Council. Editor: Malcolm Foster, Tel: 07860 250 300. Distribution: Joan Bond, Tel: (0191) 584 1031.

Circulation: 300 copies per month.

Space4

At our community project, our aim is to provide 'Space4 everyone to flourish!'

We run out of our 'Hub' (next to the library) on Newbottle Street and the Kepier Hall (behind church). You can find us on our Space4 Facebook page: www.facebook.com/HoughtonSpace4/

There's lots going on throughout the week and all are welcome:

Mon	10am-1pm	Drop in (Space4 Hub, Newbottle Street)
Tues	10am-12noon	Community Food Store (Kepier Hall)
	10am-1pm	Drop in (Space4 Hub, Newbottle Street)
	3.30pm-5pm	Tuesday Treat
Wed	10am-1pm	Drop in & Craft Group (Space4 Hub, Newbottle Street)
Thur	10am-1pm	Drop in (Space4 Hub, Newbottle Street)
Fri	10am-12noon	Community Food Store (Kepier Hall)
	10am-1pm	Drop in (Space4 Hub, Newbottle Street)
	2pm-4pm	Cake & Chat (Space4 Hub, Newbottle Street)
Sat	2pm-4pm	Monthly Saturday Group (Space4 Hub, Newbottle Street)

Other events are advertised on Facebook and in the buildings.

Our Community Foodstore is open on a Tuesday and Friday: it is for anyone in the community who wants to use it, for a donation.

Rector's Letter

At this time, we complete our journey through Lent to Holy Week and beyond to Easter. Over the last few weeks at St Michael's, we have walked a path that takes us through the shadows of Lent, into the quiet intimacy of the Upper Room, and finally to the foot of the Cross. During our journey in our services at St Michael's, I have been reflecting on a theme that sits at the heart of our faith: the power of the witness. In the Gospels, we see a spectrum of people who encountered the risen Christ. Some, like the Marys in Matthew's account, witnessed a spectacular scene of earthquakes and lightning. Others, in John's



Gospel, at first failed to recognize Jesus at all. This tells us something profound about how God works. He does not wait for us to have our lives perfectly "sorted" before he shows up. He enters into the complications, the grief, and the very real tensions of our human existence.

We see this clearly on Good Friday. As Jesus speaks those final words, "It is finished," we are forced to sit in the tension of what that meant. For the Romans and those who reject him, "finished" was simply "over and done with"—another rebel silenced. But for us, it is much more "job done"—the ultimate act of righteousness, restoring our right relationship with God. The Cross is the place where our human attempts to run our own future come to an end, and our reliance on God begins. But the story doesn't end in the tomb.

This Easter, we celebrate that the darkness could not hold the Light. Yet, for many of us, the risen Christ doesn't always appear in a bolt of lightning. More often, he is found in a "gentle nudge" or a quiet push toward a neighbour in need. I see the evidence of the Resurrection every day here in Houghton-le-Spring. I see it in the members of Mothers Union who reach out in pastoral care for our community. I see it in our volunteers at Spece4 running our drop-in and community foodstore. I see it in the music brought to us by our choir that fills our historic walls. I see it in the children's laughter from our Young Church on Sundays and in our weekly children's activities. These aren't just "good works"; they are testimony! I believe through such testimony we are all "secondary witnesses" to the Resurrection. When we reach out in love to the marginalized and the weary, we are proving that the story of Easter is still being written 2,000 years later. We do what we do because of our faith in the One who walked to the Cross in love for us and was raised on the third day.

As we enter this season of new life, my prayer for you is that you won't feel the need to put a "sticky plaster" over the difficult parts of your life. Bring your unresolved questions and your very real burdens to the empty tomb. Trust that the God who was raised is the same God who walks with you through the busy streets of your daily life and the quiet moments of your prayers. May you find full life in His name this Easter and feel truly able to declare:

Alleluia, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

With my prayers and very best wishes.

Christians run the London Marathon

The London Marathon (April 26th this year) is the largest fundraising event on the planet, and each Spring attracts up to 800,000 spectators along the 26.2-mile course.

Several Christians with a public Christian faith, or who are running for Christian charities, have run in recent London Marathons. Here are some notable examples from 2024 and 2025:

Chris Evans (Radio/TV Host): The Virgin Radio host, who has spoken about his faith and returning to running after feeling a “sign from God,” has completed multiple London Marathons.

Glyn Wise (Former Big Brother Star/Aspiring Priest): A former Big Brother contestant who has since trained for the ministry, he ran the marathon to raise funds for The Salvation Army.

Chris Brown (Christians in Sport): A regular marathon runner who has participated to raise money for *Christians in Sport*, often aiming to set Guinness World Records, such as the fastest marathon in a field hockey goalkeeper kit.

Gary (Barnabas Aid runner): Ran to raise funds for ‘Food.gives’, a project supporting persecuted Christians.

The Revd Rod Reid (“The Running Reverend”): A regular participant in the London Marathon, running for mental health charity MIND.

The London Marathon also frequently features runners from the *Christians in Sports* organisation, which works to support athletes and promote faith through sporting activity.

What God won't ask when you die

God won't ask what kind of car you drove, He'll ask how many people you drove who didn't have transportation.

God won't ask the square footage of your house, He'll ask how many people you welcomed into your home.

God won't ask about the clothes you had in your closet, He'll ask how many you helped to clothe.

God won't ask what your highest salary was. He'll ask if you compromised your character to obtain it.

God won't ask what your job title was, He'll ask if you performed your job to the best of your ability.

God won't ask how many friends you had, He'll ask how many people to whom you were a friend.

God won't ask in what neighbourhood you lived, He'll ask how you treated your neighbours.

God won't ask about the colour of your skin, He'll ask about the content of your character.

Could stained glass have a role in modern-day mission?

Millions of people visit cathedrals and historic churches in the UK and around the world every year. St Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey are among London's most popular tourist attractions.

In many English cities, it's the cathedral that tops the TripAdvisor list for ratings and reviews. Local churches that remain open through the week often find visitors drawn to them – to look around, pray, reflect, or simply pause amid busy lives.

When the Bible Society's Quiet Revival report was published last year, the headlines rightly focussed on the numbers of young people being drawn to church.

But, within the report's pages was another, perhaps surprising, finding. It was that one of the top three places for people with no religion, or non-practising Christians to encounter the Bible was while sightseeing in a cathedral or church.

This underlines the importance of churches making available good, printed material and displays explaining the Christian gospel.

Yet it also may show the importance of a form of Christian communication that many modern-day evangelists may have ignored. The enduring appeal of stained glass.

Historian Janet Gough has recently produced 'Divine Light,' a survey of some of the best stained glass in England's cathedrals. She explained, "The stained-glass windows of England's cathedrals illuminate interior spaces, communicate religious, historical and political messages, and perhaps offer us a glimpse of heaven."

Earlier examples of stained glass often depicted biblical scenes, illustrating scripture for those unable to read the accounts themselves.

In today's society, dominated as it is by the visual image – from Instagram to YouTube, TikTok and Facebook – these colourful windows could help introduce contemporary people to Bible narratives and gospel truths.

There is much biblical truth to be found in stained glass windows for those who look with an inquiring mind. In many cases, some knowledge of scripture may help decipher the stories being told. In others, the viewer is invited into an encounter with the divine: to look in awe and wonder at the artistry, and to feel an emotional – perhaps spiritual – response to what they see.

In our supremely visual age, these works of art – both ancient and modern – can capture the attention and imagination of the millions who are drawn to our cathedrals and historic churches.

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Email: kim@hettontowntrust.co.uk



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Dairy Lane, DH4 5BW

Function room available for Christenings and other functions Catering available if required

Contact: The Clubhouse 0191 584 1460
Email: houghtonrugbyclub@outlook.com



Parish of **Houghton-le-Spring**

The Annual Parochial Church Meeting will be held in **Church**

on the **26th** day of **April 2026** at **11.15 am**

For election of parochial representatives of the laity as follows—

To the Deanery Synod **3** representatives.¹

To the Parochial Church Council **7** representatives.

For the appointment of the Independent Examiner or Auditor.

For the consideration of:

- (a) a report on changes to the Roll since the last annual parochial church meeting OR² a report on the numbers entered on the new Roll;
- (b) an Annual Report on the proceedings of the parochial church council and the activities of the parish generally;
- (c) the financial statements of the council for the year ending on the 31st December preceding the meeting;
- (d) the annual report under section 50 of the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Care of Churches Measure 2018;
- (e) a report of the proceedings of the deanery synod; and
- (f) other matters of parochial or general Church interest.

In this Notice, 'parish' means an ecclesiastical parish.

Signed:

Minister of the parish³

¹ To be included in a year which parochial representatives of the laity are to be elected to the Deanery Synod.

² To be included in a year when a new Church Electoral Roll is prepared. Delete as applicable.

³ Or vice-chair of the parochial church council as the case may be (see rule M19(2) of the Church Representation Rules).

Notes

1. Every lay person whose name is entered on the Church Electoral Roll of the parish (and no other person) is entitled to vote at the election of parochial representatives of the laity.
2. A person is qualified to be elected a parochial representative of the laity if –
 - (a) his or her name is entered on the Church Electoral Roll of the parish and, unless he or is under 18, has been entered there for at least the preceding six months;
 - (b) he or she is an actual communicant (which means that he has received Communion according to the use of the Church of England or of a Church in communion with the Church of England at least three times during the twelve months preceding the date of the election);
 - (c) he or she is at least 16; and
 - (d) he or she is not disqualified as referred to in paragraph 3 of these Notes.
3. (1) A person is disqualified from being nominated, chosen or elected or from serving as a churchwarden or a member of a parochial church council, a district church council or a joint council if the person is disqualified from being a trustee of a charity (and the disqualification is not subject to a waiver which permits membership of a parochial church council, district church council or joint council).

(2) A person is disqualified from being nominated, chosen or elected or from serving as a member of a parochial church council, a district church council, a joint council or a deanery synod if the person is included in a barred list (within the meaning of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006).

(3) A person is disqualified from being nominated, chosen or elected or from serving as a member of a parochial church council, a district church council, a joint council or a deanery synod if the person has been convicted of an offence mentioned in Schedule 1 to the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 (with that expression being construed in accordance with Rule 71(2) of the Church Representation Rules).

(4) A person's disqualification under sub-paragraph (3) may be waived by the bishop of the diocese by giving the person notice in writing.

(5) A person is disqualified from being nominated, chosen or elected or from serving as a member of a parochial church council if the person has been disqualified from holding office under section 10(6) of the Incumbent (Vacation of Benefices) Measure 1977.
4. ⁴ A scheme is in operation in this parish which provides that any person entitled to vote in the elections of parochial representatives of the laity to the parochial church council or to the deanery synod or to both may apply on the appropriate form to the Minister of the parish (or other person signing below) for a postal vote. The completed form must be received before the commencement of the annual parochial church meeting.

⁴ This paragraph should be deleted if no scheme for postal voting is in operation in the parish.



Prayer for April

Loving Father,

Thank you for Jesus; for His life and death, but most of all for His resurrection, which makes all things new and possible.

Thank you for the reality that He defeated death by His work on the Cross and offers life forever with Him to all who believe in Him and receive Him into their lives as Lord and Saviour. Thank you for that incomprehensible but very real resurrection peace that we can know even in our darkest times by the presence of your Holy Spirit in us. In joy and thankfulness, we praise and honour you this Eastertime.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

FROM THE REGISTERS

Funerals

10 Mar Elizabeth Brown Age 85

Baptisms

17 Mar Layla Houghton
17 Mar John Houghton
22 Mar Jacob Jones
22 Mar Freddie Armstrong
24 Mar Matilda Murphy

Marriage

11 Mar Eric Chas Albert Rap Daniel
Harrison & Shelby Miller

National Gardening Week - 28th April to 4th May

Led by the Royal Horticultural Society, this annual premier UK celebration encourages everyone to experience the joy of gardening.

Aimed especially at beginners, events and activities are run up and down the country, offering tips, events, and resources to promote the health, wellbeing, and environmental benefits of cultivating plants. The RHS provides expert tips, how-to guides, and fun, easy gardening challenges to build confidence in new gardeners.

More at: <https://www.nationalgardeningweek.org.uk>

THANK YOU

A heartfelt thanks for all the messages of support and sympathy cards following the loss of my beloved Neil.

A special thanks for all you to all the Ministry team for their support and for such a beautiful service.

Lynn xx

Saint for April

EASTER, the most joyful day of the year

Easter is the most joyful day of the year for Christians. Christ has died for our sins. We are forgiven. Christ has risen! We are redeemed! We can look forward to an eternity in His joy! Hallelujah!

The Good News of Jesus Christ is a message so simple that you can explain it to someone in a few minutes. It is so profound that for the rest of their lives they will still be 'growing' in their Christian walk with God.

Why does the date move around so much? Because the date of Passover moves around, and according to the biblical account, Easter is tied to the Passover. Passover celebrates the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, and it lasts for seven days, from the middle of the Hebrew month of Nisan, which equates to late March or early April.

Sir Isaac Newton was one of the first to use the Hebrew lunar calendar to come up with firm dates for the first Good Friday: Friday 7th April 30 AD or Friday 3rd April, 33 AD with Easter Day falling two days later. Modern scholars continue to think these two Fridays to be the most likely.

Most people will tell you that Easter falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Spring Equinox, which is broadly true. But the precise calculations are complicated and involve something called an 'ecclesiastical full moon', which is not the same as the moon in the sky. The earliest possible date for Easter in the West is 22nd March, which last fell in 1818. The latest is 25th April, which last happened in 1943.

Why the name, 'Easter'? In almost every European language, the festival's name comes from 'Pesach', the Hebrew word for Passover. The Germanic word 'Easter', however, seems to come from *Eostre*, a Saxon fertility goddess mentioned by the Venerable Bede. He thought that the Saxons worshipped her in 'Eostur month,' but may have confused her with the classical dawn goddesses like *Eos* and *Aurora*, whose names mean 'shining in the east'. So, Easter might have meant simply 'beginning month' – a good time for starting up again after a long winter.

Finally, why Easter eggs? On one hand, they are an ancient symbol of birth in most European cultures. On the other hand, hens start laying regularly again each Spring. Since eggs were forbidden during Lent, it's easy to see how decorating and eating them became a practical way to celebrate Easter.

Loving people in later life

Nearly one in five people in England are aged 65 and over, with more than a quarter of the population expected to be above 65 by 2065.

These figures illustrate why UK churches need to keep a focus on outreach to older people. To ignore them is to miss out on a major mission opportunity.

And so current initiatives include lunch clubs, exercise sessions, singing classes, tea and coffee times, outings and a broad range of social activities open to the community.

But 'later life' or 'retirement years' is a catch-all term that says little about the fast-growing number of people in these age groups. A fit-and-well 65-year-old is very different to a 95-year-old person living in a care home.

One – hopefully helpful – way of describing ministry to older people focuses on their health and ability. My proposed categories would be:

The 'go-go' people: Men and women, often new to retirement, who are physically and mentally active and often looking for opportunities for voluntary service in areas, perhaps very different to their previous paid work.

This age group is often the backbone of many churches, providing the voluntary support for all kinds of church activities – from staffing the church toddlers' group to membership of the church council.

The 'slow-go' people: Men and women who are no longer as active, perhaps because of illness, adjusting to life following bereavement, or needing to care for a family member.

Here the mission opportunity may be around inviting them to join in church social events, such as lunch clubs or drop-ins, where they can meet new people and be drawn into the life of the church.

The 'no-go' people: These are older people who are now home-based or living in a care setting. Visits from church members, services held at care homes, and 'live-streaming' of church services can also be a link for them to the worshipping community. Many churches have adopted care homes in their area.

And then, at the end of life, churches can also provide sensitive funeral services, tailored to the wishes of the bereaved, and their families.

Ministering to men and women in later life can be richly rewarding, both for the people concerned, and for the churches who take on this important ministry. We ignore it at our peril...

Christian Motorcyclists Association - CMA

“Changing the World, One Heart at a Time”

CMA International was formed by a pastor in the USA in 1975 to minister to the biking community. It now has associated groups in over 35 countries, with 125,000 members worldwide. The UK became part of this in 1983 and now has over 30 branches.

Each branch is open to bikers from any Christian denomination, and the Tyne and Wear Branch covers a large area and has members from 9 different churches who help at rallies and ride outs. The CMA is not a motorcycle club, but a ministry. With the help of the Bible Society, a Biker's Bible was introduced in 2007 and to date over 120,000 of them have been given out. The T&W branch also gives out a card with a biker prayer on it, and these have been very well received. Some branch members faithfully attend the bike meet at the Washington Wildfowl Park two nights a week from April until October, meeting up and making friends with local bikers, giving out prayer cards and bibles as appropriate, as well as looking at bikes, talking about bikes, fantasizing about bikes – you get the picture!

There are events all over the country as well as in Europe which CMA UK branch members attend. This year the European Motorcycle meet for CMA is in Finland.

The T&W branch helps at various biker events every year, but it's all hands on deck from lots of different branches at two of the largest bike rallies: Farmyard at Helmsley, N. Yorkshire and Stormin' The Castle at Bishop Auckland. These rallies are run by a Rider's Rights Organisation called MAG (Motorcycle Action Group) and there are thousands of bikers coming from near and far to enjoy the rally. CMA UK runs a coffee tent called 'Holy Joe's' at both these rallies. It is open for 24 hours over two nights serving coffee and biscuits and giving a restful place for bikers to chill out away from the entertainment venues and general mayhem of the camping grounds. One of the members also goes out at all hours to supply coffee or hot chocolate to the MAG Marshalls who look after the entrances to the parks and camping grounds.

CMA members are on hand to talk to people and to look after those who are brought in a bit worse for wear as they can't find their tents. The Rally stewards also know they can depend on finding a sober driver in case there are any accidents which mean someone has to be taken to hospital. One of the rules of CMA is 'no alcohol when you have your waistcoat on'.

New members are always welcome and more information about the CMA can be found at www.bike.org.uk or contact@bike.org.uk

Debbie Anderson



The Month Ahead..... April

1	Wed	Holy Wednesday	10.00 am Space4 Mums (Hub, Newbottle Street)
			7.00 pm Holy Week Communion in Holy Week (in Church)
2	Thur	Maundy Thursday	10.00 am Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
			10.00 am <i>Please note no service this morning</i>
			11.00 am Blessing of the Oils (Durham Cathedral)
			7.00 pm Maundy Thursday Communion (St Michael's, Houghton-le-Spring)
			8.00 pm 'Watch'
			8.50 pm Compline ends 'Watch'
3	Fri	Good Friday	9.30 am Stay & Play (Kepier Hall, until 11.15 am)
			9.30 am Community Food Store (Kepier Hall, until 12 noon)
			10.00 am 'All-In' Worship on Good Friday (in Church)
			11.15 am 'Walk of Witness' (starting in Church)
			2.00 pm Good Friday Liturgy (in Church)
5	Sun	Easter Sunday	8.30 am Easter Day Communion (in Church)
			10.00 am Sung Easter Day Communion (in Church & Facebook)
			6.00 pm Service of Light (in Church)
6	Mon		6.00 pm <i>No Vestry hour</i> (call Parish Office for appointment)
7	Tues		10.00 am Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
			3.30 pm <i>No Family Fun</i> (Kepier Hall)
8	Wed		10.00 am Space4 Mums (Hub, Newbottle Street)
9	Thur		10.00 am Holy Communion (in Church)
			10.00 am Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
			6.00 pm Choir Practice (Choir Vestry)
10	Fri		9.30 am <i>No Stay & Play</i> (Kepier Hall, until 11.15 am)
			9.30 am Community Food Store (Kepier Hall, until 12 noon)
			2.00 pm Cake & Chat (Hub, Newbottle Street)
11	Sat		10.00 am Coffee Morning (in Church, until 1.00 pm)
12	Sun	Second Sunday of Easter	8.30 am Holy Communion (in Church)
			10.00 am Holy Communion (in Church & Facebook)
			6.00 pm Choral Evensong (in Church)
13	Mon		10.00 am Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
			2.30 pm Community Food Store (Kepier Hall, until 4.30 pm)
			6.00 pm Vestry hour (call Parish Office for appointment)

14	Tues	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		3.30 pm	<i>No Family Fun</i> (Kepier Hall)
15	Wed	10.00 am	Space4 Mums (Hub, Newbottle Street)
16	Thur	10.00 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
		10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		6.00 pm	Choir Practice (Choir Vestry)
17	Fri	9.30 am	<i>No Stay & Play</i> (Kepier Hall, until 11.15 am)
		9.30 am	Community Food Store (Kepier Hall, until 12 noon)
		2.00 pm	Cake & Chat (Hub, Newbottle Street)
19	Sun	Third Sunday of Easter	
		8.30 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
		10.00 am	'All-In' Holy Communion (in Church & Facebook)
		6.00 pm	Reflective Service (in Church)
20	Mon	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		2.30 pm	Community Food Store (Kepier Hall, until 4.30 pm)
		6.00 pm	Vestry hour (call Parish Office for appointment)
21	Tues	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		3.30 pm	Family Fun (Kepier Hall)
22	Wed	10.00 am	Space4 Mums (Hub, Newbottle Street)
23	Thur	10.00 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
		10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		6.00 pm	Choir Practice (Choir Vestry)
24	Fri	9.30 am	Stay & Play (Kepier Hall, until 11.15 am)
		9.30 am	Community Food Store (Kepier Hall, until 12 noon)
		2.00 pm	Cake & Chat (Hub, Newbottle Street)
26	Sun	Fourth Sunday of Easter	
		8.30 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
		10.00 am	Holy Communion (in Church & Facebook)
		11.15 am	APCM
		1.00 pm	Baptism
		6.00 pm	Celtic Eucharist (in Church)
27	Mon	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		2.30 pm	Community Food Store (Kepier Hall, until 4.30 pm)
		6.00 pm	Vestry hour (call Parish Office for appointment)
28	Tues	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		3.30 pm	Family Fun (Kepier Hall)
29	Wed	10.00 am	Space4 Mums (Hub, Newbottle Street)
30	Thur	10.00 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
		10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		6.00 pm	Choir Practice (Choir Vestry)

STEWARDING - OPEN CHURCH

Would you like to be part of a team of Stewards who are in attendance at St. Michael and All Angels Parish Church during the summer months?

This year we will be opening on Tuesday, 7th April 2026 through to October.

It is our hope that we will be able to open the doors each day between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Tuesday to Saturday. Of course, this depends very much on whether we can attract enough Stewards to staff the building throughout the week. You can choose whether to volunteer for one slot a week or one a month and a day in the week that would best suit you.

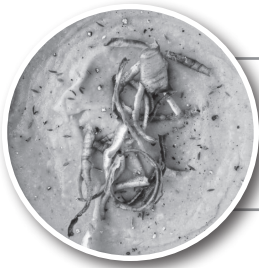
We sincerely hope existing stewards will want to sign up again for this important role of welcoming visitors to the Parish Church.

It is by no means a difficult, onerous task; in fact, those who have been stewards for several years consider it to be a privilege to serve the Church in this way. It is a wonderful opportunity to meet different people i.e., those who will be part of the team, as well as the casual visitors who come through the door for a cuppa and a chat, for quiet reflection and prayer, to light a candle, or to look around this very significant ancient Church.

One doesn't have to be a member of St. Michael's congregation to fulfil this role. All you need is a ready smile and a welcoming, friendly manner.

We will give you some guidelines so you know what's involved and ask you to fill in a very brief form – our experienced stewards will be on hand to look after you as you begin your journey with us.

For more information or a general chat, please don't hesitate to contact Jean Henderson on 0191 584 1967
or Dian Scott on 07979 022652.



Spicy Parsnip Soup

Ingredients

1 onion
450g. parsnips
225g. carrots
2 tablespoons Olive Oil
1 tablespoon curry powder
350 ml. vegetable stock
300 ml. skimmed milk
Salt and pepper

Method

Peel and finely chop onion.

Peel and cut parsnips and carrots into evenly sized pieces.

Heat the oil in a saucepan and add the vegetables, coat with oil and cook for a few minutes until they start to soften. Add the curry powder and cook, stirring for a minute.

Stir in the stock and milk, Season with salt and pepper.

Bring to the boil then reduce heat to a gentle simmer. Cook for 15-20 mins until vegetables are soft.

Allow to cool a little and then puree in a blender or food processor until smooth. If it's too thick for your liking add more stock.

If you think it's a good idea to share your recipes with our readership, please forward them to emme0707@gmail.com. *Thank you.*

Church choirs receive £400,000 boost for programme to increase participation by children

More than 200 church choirs aimed at children and young people are to be launched in a new programme.

'The Choir Project', working in partnership with the Royal School of Church Music (RSCM), will engage children and young people with their local church choirs amid renewed interest in sacred church music.

The launch comes as campaigners press for English Evensong to be given World Heritage Status, to ensure that the centuries-old Christian choral tradition is recognised as an art form of global significance.

The number of cathedral choirs in England reached a record high of 207 in 2024, but 57% of local church choirs currently have no children.

The new programme will tap into the country's rich tradition of choral worship with a view to sparking a revival of local parish choir membership amongst Generation Alpha, engaging them actively with Christianity.

'The Choir Project' aims to support upwards of 200 churches across England to establish or renew choirs for children and young people.

Research which suggests that young people are more likely to remain active in faith communities when they are given meaningful roles, intergenerational relationships and opportunities for leadership.

The Church of England's Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board has agreed investment with RSCM of £400,000 to support the programme.

Starting choirs has proven to attract engagement from young people in churches. One church near Saltburn has grown from two to up to 18 children on a Sunday by starting a church choir.

As one young chorister said: "Every Sunday that you come, you better yourself in your singing and you better yourself in your knowledge of Jesus and God."

Another said: "I love the stories about Jesus, seeing my friends and singing with the choir."

C of E welcomes Government's Schools White Paper announcements

The Church of England has welcomed the Government's Schools White Paper and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) consultation, "recognising the opportunity they offer to secure long-term improvements for children, young people and families."

As the largest single provider of schools in England, and with a long history of serving the most vulnerable, the Church, through the National Society for Education, has committed itself to "engaging constructively with the consultation process."

Notable inclusions relate to strengthening support for children with SEND and improving the coherence of the SEND system. Also, the White Paper's ambition to enhance collaboration across the school system aligns with the Church's experience that "well-led, vision-driven school trusts can enable children and adults to flourish together."

Synod approves motion confirming LLF programme to conclude and new working group to be established

General Synod recently gave its backing to establishing working and consultative groups to continue work on same-sex relationships and marriage as the Church of England's Living in Love and Faith (LLF) process came to a conclusion.

LLF was originally set up in 2017 to explore the Church's approach to identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage.

It led to the introduction, following a key Synod vote in 2023, of public prayers of dedication, thanksgiving and asking for God's blessing for same-sex couples – known as the Prayers of Love and Faith (or PLF).

The Prayers of Love and Faith are now in use as part of regular Church of England services but the House of Bishops confirmed last month that new special or 'bespoke' services for same-sex couples would need full formal authorisation under canon law.

General Synod backs Sustainable Church Flowers motion

The General Synod recently backed a Diocesan Synod Motion from the Diocese of Worcester, encouraging churches and cathedrals to explore ways of arranging flowers that are both beautiful and environmentally responsible.

The Sustainable Church Flowers movement began as a grassroots initiative in the small rural parish of Harpley, Worcestershire, when volunteers started exploring how traditional flower-arranging methods could reflect the Church's commitment to caring for creation. It has since grown into a national and ecumenical network offering practical support to parishes, arrangers and clergy.

It encourages churches, wherever possible, to consider using seasonal, locally sourced flowers and foliage, and to phase out single-use floral foam - a 1950s-era plastic product which cannot be recycled or composted, sheds microparticles when handled, and contains the equivalent of up to ten carrier bags' worth of plastic per block. The Royal Horticultural Society has already prohibited floral foam at its shows, including Chelsea, since 2021.

The motion highlights long-established alternatives such as reusable vessels, twigs, moss, chicken wire, and metal "frogs", which for centuries enabled churches to create arrangements without single-use plastics. It also celebrates the creativity of volunteers and the opportunity to support local growers and community gardens.

The Bishop of Dudley, Martin Gorick, said: "The Sustainable Church Flowers movement rejoices in flowers and foliage in church, and encourages us to source them locally and seasonally wherever possible: remember Jesus on that hillside, rejoice in what's around you. Think simple, natural, beautiful."

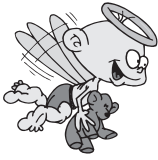
The Sustainable Church Flowers provides online resources, tutorials and local ambassadors. More at: <https://suschurchflowers.com>

What's orange, sticky and worth preserving?

This month sees National Marmalade Week (18th – 25th April). If you really want to celebrate, go to Dalemain Mansion and Gardens in Cumbria, where they hold the World Marmalade Awards & Festival. It celebrates, preserves and promotes artisanal marmalades, with thousands of entries. (Even Paddington Bear will be in attendance!)

If you like marmalade, ever wonder where it comes from? One tradition traces it to a storm-damaged Spanish ship which took refuge in Dundee Harbour in 1700. It was full of Seville oranges that the captain was desperate to sell before they went mouldy. A local down-on-luck merchant, one James Keiller, bought the lot. He didn't know what to do with the oranges either, but fortunately, he had a resourceful wife. She set about turning a shipload of Seville oranges into a preserve, and so the first marmalade factory was born.

Marmalade has been at the heart of British breakfasts for centuries. Winston Churchill fought the Second World War on it (washed down with a flute of Pol Roger each morning). DH Lawrence wrote novels on it. Paddington Bear's sandwiches were all marmalade. If you also want to get your fingers sticky, visit: www.marmaladeawards.com.



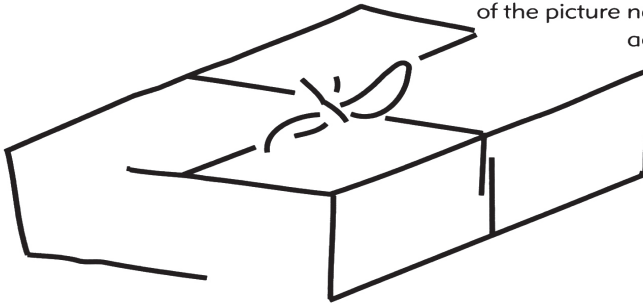
Michael's Angels

Matthew 2

We Come Bearing Gifts

Magi from the East followed the star to Bethlehem, and brought gifts to Jesus. It is thought that this event may have inspired today's custom of Christmas giving.

Read the three gift descriptions that follow. Then, to see what the gifts mean, write the first letters of the picture names in the blanks. The account of the Magi is found in Matthew 2:1-12.



1. This gift from deep in the earth could have been shaped as a beautiful bowl, a crown of jewels, coins, or a shiny statue. . . . GOLD.

It is the symbol of _____.



2. This gift, burned, was collected as sap from a tree that grows in Africa and Asia. . . . INCENSE.

It is the symbol of _____.



3. This gift, used in perfume and embalming, started out as a gummy substance from a bush. . . . MYRRH.

It is the symbol of _____.



Celebrate cross of St George as symbol of unity for everyone in England – bishops

The cross of St George, the flag of England, should be celebrated as a symbol of unity in our nation, rooted in our Christian heritage, a group of leading Church of England bishops from across the country have said.

In a joint statement, they urge people to embrace or rediscover our Christian heritage but also call for a fresh recognition of the meaning of the cross as the symbol of God's love for everyone.

They warn against the use of Christian symbols to intimidate others and call for a "mature debate" on the different impacts of migration, noting that churches can act as "spaces where different response to immigration can be listened to with respect and dignity".

The statement is issued by a working group of seven bishops set up late last year at the request of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to consider questions of national unity and diversity amid concerns about polarisation within society, as well as equipping local churches to help bridge divides.

Prompted by widespread discussion about the displays of flags in communities across England last summer and autumn, they say: "We rejoice that the flag of St George is the national flag of England and contains a cross as a sign of our Christian heritage.

"This heritage should be celebrated.

"However, the flag cannot be owned by any one group or cause. Rather it is a symbol of unity, inclusion and our common life around which we all gather."

They warn against the use of Christian symbols, such as the cross or flags to intimidate others, observing: "Sadly, in recent months, we have seen these symbols used by people who, far from working for unity in the nation, are seeking to sow division and misunderstanding.

"This leaves many in our society feeling anxious and afraid and is a long way from loving our neighbour in the way that Jesus taught."

Drawing from their own experience of inter-faith engagement, the bishops argue that “the vast majority” of people of all backgrounds and faiths accept the country’s Christian heritage and “want to unite behind the flag as a symbol of national unity and inclusion, based on our Christian heritage and broader values of respect, compassion and care for all.”

And they make a central invitation to people to come to their local church to explore the “true significance of the cross of Jesus Christ”.

“There is little point claiming it as our heritage if we don’t understand its meaning,” they write.

“Thousands of local churches across the country stand ready to explore this meaning with people of all backgrounds in the communities we continue to serve.”

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT

LIGHT

LIGHT is a mutual support group for anyone who is finding bereavement hard to bear.

Come and chat with us over a cup of tea at

Space4

on the first Tuesday of the month from

1.15pm to 2.30pm

*We are located below the library on
Newbottle Street.*

*Enter through the automatic doors and you
will find us to the right of the library escalator.*



Remembering Francis Bacon

Four hundred years ago, on 9th April 1626, Francis Bacon, philosopher and politician, died of pneumonia. He served as Attorney General of England and Wales (1613-17) and then Lord High Chancellor of England (1617-21). He was known as the “Father of Empiricism”, as his works influenced the scientific revolution in Europe.

Although involved in high-end politics, Bacon’s primary interest was in promoting a sceptical and methodical approach to scientific experimentation, which he saw as a way of glorifying God. A devout Anglican, he wrote that superficiality in science promoted atheism, but deep research “bringeth men’s minds about to religion”.

Bacon was born in central London in 1561 and was educated at home to start with because of poor health. His father was Lord Keeper of the Great Seal and his mother the daughter of a prominent Renaissance humanist. She was also sister-in-law of the powerful William Cecil, 1st Baron Burghley.

Multi-talented and with a keen intellect, Bacon had a long career as a parliamentarian, being first elected as MP for a Cornwall seat in 1581, but also as a respected author and as a judge, where he was pro-Puritan but also had a reputation as a liberal-minded reformer who opposed religious persecution.

Bacon thrived when James I came to the throne in 1603, and he was knighted and adopted as an ally to the monarch. He also married the 13-year-old Alice Barnham, daughter of a Sheriff of London, but the marriage was probably not a happy one.

Although he was regarded by most as fair and compassionate, Bacon had strong and long-term enemies, including Sir Edward Coke, who charged him with 23 counts of corruption when as Lord Chancellor he accepted as gifts what seemed to some to be bribes. He was fined and imprisoned briefly but later pardoned by the King.

— International Jazz Day – 30th April —

Jazz is a bit like Marmite – you either love it or loathe it. For those who love it, look out for International Jazz Day at the end of this month.

International Jazz Day brings together communities, schools, artists, historians, academics, and jazz enthusiasts worldwide to learn about jazz and its roots, future and impact.

At the All-Star Global Concert 2025 in Abu Dhabi, UNESCO officials announced that Herbie Hancock’s hometown of Chicago, USA, will host the 15th anniversary International Jazz Day celebration in 2026.

For over a century, Chicago has been a jazz mecca. In the 1920s, jazz musicians sailed up the Mississippi from New Orleans and found Chicago to be a creative hub. Jazz legends such as Louis Armstrong, King Oliver and Jelly Roll Morton made their names in the city, developing the ‘Chicago style’ of jazz. This style valued solos, improvisation, big band arrangements and a faster, more rhythmic sound.

For International Jazz Day 2026, Chicago will host a series of jazz concerts, educational initiatives, discussions and events for audiences of all ages, in partnership with the Chicago Jazz Alliance, the Ravinia Festival, the City of Chicago, the Illinois Arts Council, the State of Illinois and others.

A history of our Easter chocolate

Chocolate. Just a mention of the word can trigger off all kinds of emotions: craving, greed, passion. Few foods have the ability to get such a hold on people. As you buy your Easter eggs and bunnies and whatever else this month, here are some of the facts of chocolate:

Where does chocolate come from? Chocolate is made from the seeds of the tropical cacao tree, theobroma cacao. The Greek word 'theobroma' means literally 'food of the gods'. The Cacao Tree is found in Latin America.

Who first discovered it? The Aztecs. The cacao beans were used to prepare a hot, frothy beverage with stimulant and restorative properties, something like hot chocolate.

Who was (probably) the first chocoholic? The Emperor Montezuma. He drank 50 goblets a day of the frothy drink.

Who used chocolate as currency? The Aztecs. 100 cacao beans would buy a slave; 12 cacao beans bought the services of a courtesan, etc.

When did chocolate as we know it today begin? Surprisingly, not until 1879. That year Rodolphe Lindt had the inspired idea of triglyceride cocoa butter. The cocoa butter in chocolate contains saturated fat, but a normal level of consumption doesn't have any bad effects.

At what point does a chocolate lover become a chocoholic? It is generally considered to be when a person feels impelled to consume 12 or more 60 gram bars of chocolate per week. Chocolate contains its own cannabinoid (a chemical that prolongs pleasurable sensations) and when you eat chocolate, there is an increased blood flow in areas of the brain which are also activated by addictive drugs such as cocaine. But scientists agree that occasional over-indulging will cause no long-term problems... except perhaps around your waistline!

How to get the best from your chocolate:

Keep your chocolate cool (16 – 18 degrees Centigrade) and in a dry, airtight place.

Never put your chocolate in the fridge (if you already have, let it warm to room temperature for a couple of hours before you eat it).

Bring out the full flavour of chocolate by drinking water with it.

If you are drinking tea or coffee, don't bother with expensive chocolates – you won't be able to appreciate them properly!

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MEMORIALS

We hope this system will help us to meet requests for memorials more efficiently.

Should you wish for a loved one to be remembered on their anniversary in the weekly prayers read during the Sunday services, please complete the slip opposite.

Cut out the slip and place it in the intercessions box at least one week prior to the Sunday for remembrance.

If you are unable to get to church, please post the slip to the Church Administrator: Mrs Philippa Elsey, Parish Church of St Michael and All Angels, The Broadway, Houghton-le-Spring.

MEMORIAL REQUEST

Name of person to be remembered:

.....

Request made by:

.....

.....

.....

Date for memorial:

Sunday,

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ST MICHAEL & ALL ANGLES
HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING



You're invited to join us for **Holy Week & Easter**



Palm Sunday

8.30 am Palm Sunday Holy Communion

10 am Holy Communion with Procession of Palms

6 pm Passiontide Devotion 'Tokens of his Passion'

Mon - Wed

7 pm Holy Week Communion (in Church)

Maundy Thursday

**7 pm Maundy Thursday Communion with Foot washing
& Stripping of Sanctuary**

8-9 pm Watch followed by Compline

Good Friday

10 am All Age Worship followed by Hot Cross Buns

11.15 am Walk of Witness

**2 pm Good Friday Liturgy with Proclamation of the
Cross**

Easter Sunday

8.30 am Easter Day Communion

10 am Sung Easter Day Communion

6 pm Service of Light

