

Pathways



The magazine for the people of the Diocese of Oxford

Summer 2026

A time for reflection

Bishop Steven looks back on a decade at the helm of the Diocese of Oxford

PLUS: The town church with mission at its core / Joy at major change in Berkshire congregations

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Introduction

Welcome to the summer 2026 edition of *Pathways*, the magazine for the people of the Diocese of Oxford. This edition is notable on two counts – it is the first since the retirement of the Rt Revd Dr Steven Croft as Bishop of Oxford and the first since we ran our consultation on what you want *Pathways* to be.

As you would expect, Bishop Steven's departure from the diocese features heavily in this edition. Bishop Steven himself reflects on his time with us in a thought piece on page four, while the news section of this edition contains several references to his retirement – his farewell service, his last Diocesan Synod and tributes from the Archbishop of Canterbury at General Synod.

As well as this, Diocesan Secretary Mark Humphriss looks at the process of finding Bishop Steven's successor in a piece that explains the Vacancy-in-See process – what has happened so far and what is to come.

Last autumn's consultation on *Pathways* gave us some really valuable insights into what people thought of it.

Did people feel we should be continuing with it as a printed product or should it go entirely digital? What content did they like? What content did they feel we might have been missing? Was it even a product worth persevering with? These were just some of the questions we asked.

We have listened to your responses – and this edition is the result.

One of the key findings of the consultation was that people really wanted to see more of a news round-up, with many speaking fondly of the stories they used to read in *The Door*, the previous Diocese of Oxford magazine. This edition of *Pathways*, therefore, has eight pages of news – starting with a story and picture spread on Bishop Steven's farewell service before looking at some of the key events from around the diocese over recent months.

You also told us that you wanted to read about our churches and our people, so we have featured the brilliant mission work done by Christ Church in Abingdon and the wonderful story of the growth of Hong Konger congregations in the Reading area, told by Revd Mark Nam.



Bishop Steven at his farewell service at Christ Church Cathedral in Oxford at the end of May

And while we recognise that churches are so much more than the bricks and mortar of their structure, we have also introduced a new feature, *Our Churches*, in which we will look at some of the beautiful and fascinating places of worship in the diocese. We welcome your suggestions for churches to spotlight in future editions.

Overall, we hope that this refreshed version of *Pathways* tells the story of the Diocese of Oxford, and that there is something in it for everyone – from the vicar and the PCC secretary to the regular member of the congregation or someone who is visiting one of our churches for the first time, perhaps for a baptism or a wedding.

Richard Tilley, Editor

‘A disciple of Jesus – a lifelong learner’

BISHOP STEVEN reflects on a decade leading the Diocese of Oxford and why he will always be wearing the L plates

Ten years ago, on the morning of my installation as Bishop of Oxford, I walked into WH Smith in Cornmarket and bought a pair of L plates. I pinned the L plates very carefully on the inside of the special cope made by the cathedral. I was looking for a way of communicating that I am a disciple of Jesus, a lifelong learner.

We never lose our L plates as Christians. I wanted to communicate that although I had been Bishop of Sheffield for seven years, I still had much to learn as I came to a new ministry in Oxford. I wanted to share honestly that, like everyone, I had made mistakes and was keen to learn from them.

I think I still have the L plates in the corner of the wardrobe where I store my robes. They’ve become a symbol for me of all I have learned across the last decade in this immensely fulfilling role.

First, it’s been a privilege to learn a huge amount about our three counties. I arrived knowing quite a bit about Oxford and had lived here twice before, but very little about the wider diocese.

I’ve enjoyed exploring the cities, towns and villages of this fascinating diocese. The contrasts are immense, from the Cotswolds to commuter land, from deeply rural to inner urban estates.

My learning has happened partly through being in different churches Sunday by Sunday, but also through two deanery tours of the whole diocese and several pilgrimages: taking a week to walk through part of the diocese, pausing to pray in different churches on the way.

I’ve learned so much about the resilience and importance of local churches and chaplaincies, particularly during the pandemic and the lockdowns. There was no map for the local church to follow. We witnessed an incredible creativity

and determination as churches moved services online, and a great outpouring of different gifts.

The pandemic was exhausting in many different ways and deeply affected every local community. In the four years since the end of lockdown, energy has been slowly returning to our churches and our chaplaincies, thanks to the committed work of so many clergy and volunteers.

I’ve learned a lot about the opportunities and pressures facing children and young people. Ann and I had one grandchild when I became Bishop of Oxford. We leave with nine grandchildren. Each has been a great blessing.

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The L plates have become a symbol of all I have learned across the last decade in this immensely fulfilling role

I’ve learned so much from church schools, which are such a key part of our diocese, and from all those who are called to work with children and young people week by week in our churches. It’s good to see ministry with children and young people beginning to grow again and to see chaplaincy established in so many of our schools.

Unexpectedly, I’ve found myself learning a great deal about artificial intelligence, robotics and online safety through the work I’ve been called to do in the House of Lords.



Bishop Steven at his installation in 2016, with L plates visible

The technology is continually evolving and changing, and so are the challenges to individuals and to society as a whole. The Church of England needs to make its voice heard in the public square on technology, on climate and the environment, on health and on so many other issues as we serve the communities of our diocese.

And finally, and most importantly, I've continued to learn more about the wideness of God's mercy and about following Jesus.

Towards the beginning of my time as Bishop of Oxford, together we discerned a very simple vision for the Diocese: to be a more Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world.

We set ourselves the goal of living out the Beatitudes, to be a blessing, in our call to be more contemplative, more compassionate and more courageous. I hope I've learned something about each of those three 'C's in every year of ministry.

It's been good to share the journey of learning with so many people each Lent for the last six years through Come and See.

As my time as Bishop of Oxford draws to a close, I am giving thanks for all of that learning, and for the clergy, lay leaders, teachers and colleagues who have taught me so much across the years. I'm thankful for those who have been patient with me and who have shared the journey.

I'm still wearing the L plates as we prepare to relocate to St Albans. I need to learn new lessons about the next part of my calling to follow Jesus. There will be new companions on the road, new challenges to overcome, new discoveries to make of the grace and love of God.

It's been a privilege to share this ministry with so many across the Diocese of Oxford. Thank you, and may God bless this diocese and every church, chaplaincy and school in the coming years.

‘A diocese walking together towards our next bishop’

MARK HUMPHRISS, Diocesan Secretary, considers the first stage of the process to find Bishop Steven’s replacement

The time was always going to come for Bishop Steven to retire and, like many across the diocese, I will miss the gifts, steadiness and wisdom he has brought to our shared life.

His departure also meant something else rather practical – I knew that the word ‘See’ would suddenly appear with surprising regularity in conversations and emails.

The Church of England appoints diocesan bishops through a long and careful process. The first stage takes place within the diocese, and here in Oxford we began with the Vacancy in See Committee. Ours had 49 members.

That number alone could feel daunting but the committee benefitted from the calm and generous leadership of Revd Canon Geoff Bayliss. Across seven meetings he enabled wide participation, good humour and a tone that honoured the breadth of the diocesan community.

From the outset a Statement of Needs group set to work producing the document that would eventually guide the national stages of discernment.

Under the thoughtful chairing of Bishop Mary, the group crafted a profile of the diocese that felt both honest and hopeful. It acknowledged the real challenges we have faced and still face while also celebrating life and growth.

The more demanding conversations were, unsurprisingly, those about human sexuality. Every word on these pages was weighed with care.

Yet, throughout, people spoke with grace and patience.

The consultation drew more than 2,700 responses, which was extraordinary. Each response to each question was read several times by members of the communications group in order to prepare a detailed report.

A summary has since been shared and the insights shaped the Statement of Needs in very direct ways. I am grateful to every person who took time to contribute. It mattered.

Prayers held the whole process. Not every diocese has a prayer group for a vacancy but this one did, and it made a real difference. The group spent as much time in prayer as in shaping resources for others and will continue its work. We are all invited to join in.

Running alongside our diocesan work were the consultations carried out by the Appointments Secretaries to the Prime Minister and to the Archbishops.





Above: The Vacancy in See Committee at its final meeting. Below left: The six representatives from the Diocese who will sit on the Crown Nominations Commission

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Those two days brought home again the depth, diversity and richness of the place we serve

We were asked to facilitate these meetings and nearly 200 people took part. They represented parish life, civic leadership, education, ecumenical partners and those from other faiths.

Geoff and I then took the Appointments Secretaries on a two-day tour of the diocese. Seventeen stops in total. We moved from rural parishes to major urban centres and met clergy and lay people of every tradition.

In two schools we listened to students speak with clarity. We met the chief executive of Milton Keynes Council, as well as leaders from other denominations and other faiths and the police.

At the Oxford Synagogue we felt the weight of the moment as Jewish leaders shared something of their experience in these troubled times. In Reading we heard about our ministry among the Hong Kong community.

Although I travel around the diocese when I

can and always enjoy doing so, those two days brought home again the depth, diversity and richness of the place we serve. It was a reminder of why this process needs time and care.

At the final meeting 17 members stood for election to the diocesan places on the Crown Nominations Commission. That may be a record.

The Revd Matt Beer, Prof Helen King, Helen Lamb, the Revd Joy Mawdesley, the Ven Stephen Pullin and Sir Hector Sants were elected. They now join the six nationally elected members and the two Archbishops. The Appointments Secretaries continue as non-voting members.

The Oxford CNC meets in June to finalise the role profile, in October to shortlist and in December to interview. We will be praying for them at each stage and ask the diocese to join in.

People sometimes ask whether a faster process like a conclave would be better. The speed would certainly have its appeal. Yet for all the work involved, supported by an outstanding team, I would not have wanted to lose the chance for so many across the diocese to have a voice or to witness how well the committee worked together across difference.

A comment from one member, known to have strong views, made it all worthwhile. They said the process was everything they could have hoped for.

Find out more about the process at oxford.anglican.org/vacancy-in-see

Clergy and communities come together for Bishop Steven's farewell service

Bishop of Oxford encourages congregation to embrace call of baptism and fight for gospel at Christ Church event

Clergy, church leaders and communities from across Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire gathered on Sunday 31 May to mark the final service of the Rt Revd Dr Steven Croft as Bishop of Oxford.

The service took place at Christ Church Cathedral and was a chance to give thanks for Bishop Steven's faithful ministry in the diocese over the past ten years, offering prayers and good wishes to both him and his wife, Ann, and witness the laying down of the diocesan pastoral staff.

Bishop Steven opened his farewell sermon by thanking those present for their companionship, support and prayers over the past decade, reflecting on the people who had shaped his ministry and the life of the diocese.

He then turned to the theme of "wrestling with God", drawing on the story of Jacob and St Paul's letter to the Colossians. Sharing his children and grandchildren's love of the TV show *Gladiators* – the "modern equivalent of wrestling" – he brought along giant foam fingers for grandchildren and fellow bishops alike.

Encouraging the congregation to embrace the call of baptism to "fight valiantly" for the gospel, Bishop Steven urged the Church to continue striving for "a more Christ-like Church in a more just and peaceful world".

Ending with Jacob's encounter with God at Peniel, he reflected on how faithful wrestling leaves its mark but also brings blessing, giving thanks for all



The Very Revd Prof Sarah Foot officiated

that God has done in the Diocese of Oxford and expressing hope for all that is still to come.

The farewell liturgy throughout the service reflected many of the themes that have shaped his episcopal ministry – contemplation, compassion, courage, reconciliation and hope.

Readings were given by Canon Mark Humphriss (the Diocesan Secretary), the Revd Susy Brouard and the Rt Revd Olivia Graham (previously Bishop of Reading).

The service was officiated by the Very Revd



Left: Applause as Bishop Steven leaves the service. Right: Bishop Steven wore L plates, as he did at his installation. Below: The service was attended by church and community figures

Professor Sarah Foot, Dean of Christ Church. Tributes were offered by Marjorie Glasgow, His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Oxfordshire, by Imam Monawar Hussein, Deputy Lieutenant of Oxfordshire, by Prof Irene Tracey, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford, and by the Bishop of Dorchester.

Bishop Gavin reflected on what we have learnt from Bishop Steven: "You have consistently reminded us of our calling, and challenged, inspired and equipped us to be a more Christ-like Church.

"That's the call you have led for us, as this particular part of the church – those who call ourselves Anglicans in these three counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire.

"And it is the standard that you have consistently, impressively and inspiringly modelled, lived out and exemplified for us during these ten years in post... you have inspired, encouraged and enabled so many to draw closer to as we 'come and see' in our lives and in our churches the love of the God who you have served so well."



A selection of Diocese of Oxford news from November to May



Six candidates were licensed for lay ministry at Christ Church in November

November

Annual service for LLMs at cathedral

Six candidates were licensed for lay ministry at the annual service for Licensed Lay Ministers at Christ Church Cathedral.

Alongside the newly admitted ministers were licensed lay ministers from around the diocese who joined the candidates in dedicating themselves afresh to their ministry, in a service led by Bishop Gavin.

The candidates presented were Eve Hitchens (St Michael at the North Gate, Oxford), Linda Hobbs (St Helen's in Abingdon), Rachel Moss (St Michael

and St Mary Magdalene, Easthampstead), Mike Murray (St Michael's Steventon), Joe O'Neill (St Mary's Church, Aylesbury) and Karen Broadbent (Christ the King, Sonning Common).

Blessing for restored medieval window

A medieval window, which is one of the finest in the country, has been restored and was blessed in a service at All Saints Church North Moreton.

The 14th-century window, known as the Saint Nicholas Window, can be found in the chantry chapel and depicts various events from Jesus' life as well as Mary and St Nicholas.

The recently restored window, originally commissioned by

the Lord of the Manor Miles de Stapleton, was blessed at a special evensong service by the Bishop of Dorchester.

The vicar, the Revd Jason St John Nicolle, said: "It is an amazing thought that a work of art designed to do this back in 1300 is still doing it today."

Safeguarding Sunday: Time for reflection

More than 150 Parish Safeguarding Officers and church leaders marked Safeguarding Sunday with a day of reflection and renewed commitment to caring for the most vulnerable in our churches.

The afternoon included powerful contributions from the Oxford Survivor Group, support and guidance from the diocesan

City vicar meets Pope Leo at Vatican

The Revd Canon Dr Will Lamb, vicar of the University Church, Oxford, met Pope Leo during a trip to Rome in the autumn.

One of his predecessors, St John Henry Newman, served as vicar of the University Church from 1828 to 1843.

Newman became one of the leaders of the Oxford Movement before his conversion to Catholicism.

He was beatified in 2010 and canonised in 2019.

In November, Newman was declared a Doctor of the Universal Church by Pope Leo.

Revd Will was part of the Anglican delegation present at the service, which was led by the Archbishop of York.

Revd Will was involved in discussions with the team of scholars who contributed to the positio - the case for making a saint a Doctor of the Church.



Revd Canon Dr Will Lamb, right, meets Pope Leo

He said: "Newman and the Oxford Movement have shaped the life and spirituality of the University Church in many ways.

"No one can stand at the altar or preach from the pulpit from which he preached and be unaware of his legacy."

Revd Will continued: "It was an extraordinary privilege to meet the Pope.

"But also, I learned on meeting him, that he had been to Choral Vespers at the University Church. He had been a visitor here a few years before he became Pope."

safeguarding team and other experts, as well as a challenging address from Bishop Steven.

December

Bishops' response to 'Christian nationalism'

Our bishops urged churches across the diocese to continue to build strong and united communities ahead of a rally held in London purporting to put 'Christ back into Christmas'.

The rally, organised by Unite the Kingdom, was part of a rise in

Christian nationalism that our bishops called on Christians to respond to with love.

Bishop Steven said: "The adoption of Christian values to exclude or ostracise others is the exact opposite of Jesus' teachings. At the centre of the love he showed us is the love he called for us to have for everyone.

"We must love our enemies and welcome the stranger, whoever they are."

Bishop Dave, who leads the diocese on equality, diversity and inclusion, added: "When

reflecting on Christmas, we should remember Jesus loved foreigners, and loving refugees, those whose skin colour and culture are different from our own, is how we are called to be as Christians."

New Head of Children and Youth Ministry

Simon Hill was announced as the first ever Head of Children and Youth Ministry for the diocese.

Simon has served in children and youth ministry for almost 25 years, initially through parish

roles in Bournemouth and his home town of Durham, and most recently at diocesan level in Worcester.

January

Local involvement in St Paul's ceremony

The Bishop of Oxford and the Bishop of Reading were both in attendance as Bishop Sarah Mullally became the 106th Archbishop of Canterbury in a ceremony at St Paul's Cathedral.

Direct local involvement in the

ceremony came from the Revd Jo Allen, team vicar of Clifton Hampden and Burcot, Culham and Long with Little Wittenham, and the Revd Mark Nam, vicar of St John the Evangelist in Woodley, who were among those delivering the charge.

Speaking to BBC Radio Berkshire ahead of the event, Bishop Mary said: "As a female bishop, it's so important for me that the new Archbishop is also female - especially for younger women to see that these roles are opening up to women.

"It will continue to be a matter of

conversation across the Church and in the Anglican communion. But she's already leading brilliantly. She leads out of her humanity, shows vulnerability and shows a different face of the Church of England."

February

Archbishop praises Bishop at last Synod

Bishop Steven attended his final General Synod before his retirement, and was bid a fond farewell on the final day.



Distinguished service recognised at cathedral

Eight people were made honorary canons and three candidates were admitted to the Order of St Frideswide during Evensong at Christ Church Cathedral in Oxford in February.

Each person was recognised for the distinguished service to the church and the mission of God.

Congratulations to the Revd Andrew Blyth, Dr Annie Cooper, the Revd Jon Salmon, the Revd Keith Dunnett, the Revd Margreet Armitstead, the

Revd Margaret Dixon, the Revd Dr Peter Day, Dr Peter Foot, Richard Ashfield, the Revd Sami Watts and Sue Powell.

Bishop Steven said: "These are all people who have served faithfully for many years, sometimes in quite challenging situations.

"They are people who go above and beyond and have had big impacts on the communities they serve."



Revd Canon Val, middle, with Deborah Meaden and Chris Packham

Revd Canon Val appears with TV stars at Synod

The Revd Canon Val Plumb, Area Dean for Rural Mission and Development in Buckinghamshire, was among the speakers at a fringe event at General Synod in February.

She appeared alongside *Dragons' Den* investor Deborah Meaden and TV presenter Chris Packham to talk about her private member's motion that calls on the Church

Commissioners to protect nature "in line with the scale and urgency of the climate and biodiversity crises".

Revd Canon Val, acting in a personal capacity, said at the event: "If they can commit to protecting 30% of their land by 2030, the Commissioners can resurrect nature and restore hope in our future."

At her first General Synod as the new Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Revd Sarah Mullally gave thanks to Bishop Steven for his "wisdom, care and focus" through his time as bishop, both with Oxford and, before that, Sheffield.

She said: "Throughout his ministering, the furthering of God's kingdom has rightly been at the heart of all that he has done and of his calling - whether it was as a diocesan mission consultant, training and forming ordinands when warden of Cranmer Hall, when in the role of the Archbishop's

Missioner and team leader of Fresh Expressions, or during his time as the Bishop of Sheffield and subsequently Bishop of Oxford."

The Archbishop also recognised Bishop Steven's national contribution through the House of Lords, particularly around data ethics and artificial intelligence.

Archbishop Sarah concluded: "This is not goodbye but farewell as you continue to seek God's guidance for your future. We are grateful for all that you have done as a disciple of Christ, and as you and Ann

continue to walk the path ahead, be assured of our prayers for you."

March

Cassa becomes new Bucks Archdeacon

The Ven Cassa Messervy became the new Archdeacon of Buckingham in a service of collation and installation at St Mary's in Aylesbury.

The Ven Cassa took up the role following the retirement of the Ven Guy Elsmore. She brings extensive experience as a parish



The Ven Cassa Messervy's installation as Archdeacon of Buckingham in March

rector, most recently in Wychert Vale.

The Bishop of Buckingham said: "Having first met Cassa over a decade ago, I know she brings to the role both vibrant faith and significant leadership gifts.

"She has spent all of her ordained life in this county, so Cassa already has a deep knowledge of parish life here and awareness of the work of the Holy Spirit in town and village life."

Youth presence at Diocesan Synod

Diocesan Synod was blessed by the presence and contributions of young people from across the diocese in its first meeting of 2026, held at Didcot Civic Hall.

A panel of teenagers from Aylesbury, Reading and Abingdon shared openly about faith, church and the challenges of living as Christians.

One offered a candid challenge



Diocesan Synod in March was blessed by contributions from young people from across the diocese

to Synod members: "We are followers of Jesus, not simply churchgoers. If we can challenge people's perceptions [of church], we can show that Jesus is the best thing ever. I would challenge you to show young people that you are not just creaky old people - you are followers of Jesus."

The meeting also saw Bishop Steven's final presidential

address before his retirement this summer.

Reflecting on his time at the diocese, Bishop Steven said: "Ten years ago, as a diocese, we addressed the question of our common vision. We asked first what kind of church we are called to be. Our second question followed from the first: what are we called to do together at this time?"

April

Death of former Bishop announced

In April, the sad news was received of the death of Bishop Richard Harries, who was Bishop of Oxford between 1987 and 2006.

Bishop Richard died after a short illness and a few weeks before

what would have been his 90th birthday.

A full obituary can be found on Page 26 of this magazine.

May

Tommy Robinson invitation criticised

Bishop Steven and Imam Monawar Hussain issued a statement criticising the decision

of the Oxford Union to invite Tommy Robinson to speak at the University of Oxford society.

The event was subsequently postponed.

The co-chairs of the Oxfordshire Faith and Civic Leaders Forum and the Thames Valley Faith and Civic Leaders Forum described the invitation as “untimely and divisive” and called for it to be withdrawn “for the sake of this city and its peace”.



Bishop Steven signed the Armed Forces Covenant on behalf of the diocese in May

Armed Forces Covenant signed at cathedral

The Diocese of Oxford affirmed its commitment to service personnel across Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire by signing the Armed Forces Covenant.

The covenant was signed in May on behalf of the diocese by Bishop Steven during choral evensong at Christ Church Cathedral.

Also adding their signatures were Major General Peter Rowell, Commandant of the Defence Academy at Shrivenham, and the

Dean of Christ Church, the Very Revd Prof Sarah Foot.

Following the signing, Bishop Steven said: “As a diocese we are keen to support the service communities across Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, and their families.

“Today’s signing marks a significant step in formalising our commitment to do this and is a recognition of all that our armed forces give through their dedication and service.”

A town church with

We look at how Christ Church in Abingdon has built a network of relationships from Abingdon to Africa and Asia

Christ Church in Abingdon is one of the largest churches in the Diocese of Oxford. With around 600 people gathering each week across its two sites at Northcourt Road and Long Furlong, it is a lively community with a strong commitment to worship, discipleship and service. Yet for many in the congregation, the life of the church stretches far beyond the boundaries of the town. Mission is part of its fabric and has been for generations.

This outward-looking stance is shaped and sustained by the Christ Church Mission Support Group, a dedicated subgroup of the PCC. The group works to raise awareness of global mission, championing prayer and financial support for mission partners. Their work has created a network of relationships that extend from Abingdon to Europe, Asia and Africa.

The current chair of the Mission Support Group, Stephen Russell-Smith, is quick to point out that he has not created this culture. He describes it as woven into the very identity of the church.

"Where does the drive within the church for mission support work come from?" he says. "Not from me. It is in the church's DNA and was here long before I arrived."

Christ Church commits 15 per cent of its annual budget to mission beyond Abingdon. Stephen is frank about the significance of that figure. It is not an add-on. It is not a gesture. It is a core expression of who the church understands itself to be.

"It is something that is integral to the way we operate as a community," he says. "It is a hugely personal thing for everyone within the congregation. People feel connected to the individuals and organisations we support. These are not anonymous causes. They are people with



Left: Chris and Suzy Wilson and family. Right: Tabitha Sch

names and stories who share a direct link with someone in the church."

This sense of relationship is central to the way mission is supported. Mission partners are not distant figures who appear in the parish magazine once a year. They visit services, share updates and remain part of the life of the church family. Stephen sums it up simply: "It works because people give to people they know and people pray for people they know."

The missionaries and mission organisations supported by Christ Church are working in a wide range of contexts. Their stories reflect the diversity of modern mission work and the commitment required from those who go.

Among those partners are Peter and Jane Dunn, who serve with Biglife. Their work began in Asia but since 2019 they have been helping Biglife adapt its disciple-making movement for a European audience. The coming year marks a time of expansion for them. Peter is exploring opportunities in Denmark, Türkiye, Germany and Eastern Europe, while Jane continues to develop Hope Groups.

mission at its core



Schieferdecker. Top right: Inside Christ Church



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The work of the Mission Support Group is a reminder that Christian community reaches far beyond the parish

Back in the UK, Martin Riddall has returned to Agapé after a decade with the Armed Forces Christian Union. His ministry with Agapé began in 1988 and he now serves on the Church Engagement Team. Much of his work involves travelling to support churches across the country, helping Christians grow confidence in speaking about their faith in everyday environments.

Digital mission is also growing and has become a central part of the work of Tabitha Schieferdecker with Agapé UK. She helps oversee systems that allow people to encounter Christian content

on social media and uses digital storytelling in creative ways. Tabitha also trains a global network of volunteers who respond personally to spiritual questions submitted online.

For Craig and Victoria, who moved with their two sons to South Asia in 2024, mission looks more like slow and relational support among marginalised communities. They work with locally led projects that support people with disabilities, orphans, widows and others who are often overlooked.

In Addis Ababa, Chris and Suzy Wilson serve with the Christian Mission Society. Chris teaches theology at the Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology and trains church leaders in refugee camps in western Ethiopia. Suzy works with SIM, writing stories of God's work in the country and helping train Ethiopian Christians for mission.

All these stories reveal something of the breadth of mission supported by Christ Church. They also show why the congregation holds these partnerships so closely. Each person and each family is known by name. They are prayed for and celebrated. Their joys and challenges are shared across the community.

In a world that can feel fractured and fragile, the work of the Mission Support Group is a reminder that Christian community reaches far beyond the parish boundary. Whether in Abingdon, Addis Ababa or Barcelona, the same hope is being shared. And at Christ Church, that hope is nurtured with commitment, generosity and prayer.

The priest playing his part in a major demographic shift

Revd Mark Nam talks about his work at the crossroads of cultures and his pride at the welcome given to thousands of Hong Kongers by the Diocese of Oxford

When you speak to the Revd Mark Nam, vicar of St John the Evangelist in Woodley, Reading, it becomes clear that his ministry sits at the crossroads of cultures and callings.

He is British born, Chinese heritage, Anglican trained and Hong Kong formed. This unique combination has placed him at the centre of one of the most significant demographic and spiritual shifts to touch the Church of England in decades: the arrival of more than 160,000 Hong Kongers who have rebuilt their lives in the UK since 2021.

For many of these new arrivals, Mark has become one of the most recognisable Anglican voices of welcome and advocacy. His story, and his work, speak directly into this moment of rapid change.

"The number of Hong Kongers coming to the UK is really significant," he says. The government's creation of the BNO visa in 2021, after years of erosion of political freedom in Hong Kong, opened the path for the largest migration to Britain from outside Europe since Windrush. Many arrivals were Christians. Many were seeking a church home. Many were unsure where they would fit.



Revd Mark receiving a National Diversity Award

A handful of areas in England became major centres of settlement. Reading and Wokingham quickly emerged as two of the largest Hong Konger hubs in the country. Mark, serving in the Diocese of Oxford, found himself among those serving in the heart of a new mission field.

"There are around 10,000 Hong Kongers living in the Reading area," he explains. "I believe that Wokingham has the highest number of Hong Kongers in the UK after Sutton in Surrey."

The speed and scale of the movement created immediate pastoral questions. How would churches respond? Would people feel at home in the Church of England? Would the cultural distance be too great?

Mark watched as Anglicans opened their doors, offered friendship and found creative ways to welcome new neighbours. "Hong Kongers were made to feel welcome very quickly," he says with



Around 500 Hong Kongers now worship weekly as part of the SDF BHK ecumenical project

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Our flourishing Hong Konger congregations should be seen as one of Bishop Steven’s great legacies as he retires

pride. “And that is not necessarily easy. Many come from low church traditions. A priest in robes or a tall spire is not what church looks like for them. So for them to feel confident here so quickly is something we can all feel proud of.”

He is clear that this did not happen simply by chance. He praises the leadership of Bishop Steven for embedding diversity and inclusion into diocesan life in ways that are structural rather than symbolic. “Our flourishing Hong Konger congregations should be seen as one of Bishop Steven’s great legacies as he retires,” Mark says.

Nowhere is this flourishing more visible than in the Strategic Development Funding Berkshire Hong Kongers project – SDF BHK – a local ecumenical partnership formed between Anglican, Methodist and United Reformed Churches. Its first Cantonese services were held at Trinity in Earley

in 2022, and it has since planted a Cantonese-speaking congregation in St Mary’s Winnersh. Around 500 Hong Kongers now worship weekly as part of SDF BHK’s network, with further congregations being planted at St Barnabas Emmer Green and Reading Gateway this year.

The Diocese of Oxford’s success in providing a home for Hong Kongers is reflected in the central role that it plays in a newly created national steering group – Hong Kongers in the Church of England.

The group supports dioceses learning how to support a community that has travelled far in search of both freedom and belonging. Among its members are SDF BHK associate vicar Revd Fung Lau, Katie Woo, the National Church Hong Kong Communities Enabler in Berkshire, and the Archdeacon of Berkshire, the Ven Stephen Pullin.

Mark also serves as a member of Hong Kongers in the Church of England, representing The Teahouse, a national network championing the visibility and support of Chinese heritage clergy.

Mark’s own deep connection to Hong Kong predates all these developments. Long before his ministry in Reading, he spent nine formative years in Hong Kong as a pastor.

The church he served brought together expats, local Chinese and refugees in a shared life of worship. It reshaped his understanding of what

the church can be. It also laid the foundations for the role he plays today.

His time there sharpened his awareness of cultural identity within church leadership and deepened his desire to see East Asian Christians flourish in settings where they are often under-represented. Chinese heritage clergy account for only 0.02% of stipendiary priests in the Church of England. Mark is determined to help shift that.

In 2021 he founded The Teahouse. What began as a small initiative has become a vital space for ordinands and priests navigating ministry in an institution still learning how to reflect the full breadth of the communities it serves.

Mentoring East Asian ordinands is, for Mark, a vocation within a vocation. He describes it as a "sacred space" where questions of identity and calling can be explored safely.

His work extends well beyond parish boundaries. Mark also serves as chaplain to the Royal Air Force and to Church Mission Society students in Oxford, and he sits on the boards of SPCK Publishing and the Li Tim Oi Foundation, which supports the theological education of women worldwide.

Recognition for his work has followed. In 2023 he received a Lambeth Award for outstanding service and in 2025 he was named a National Diversity Awards Positive Role Model for Race, Religion and Faith.

His commentary is sought after, and he regularly features on the BBC, Premier Radio and UCB.

His writing appears in a range of publications, including academic works exploring both

Chinese heritage Christianity and AI, and this year he delivered one of the charges at the welcome ceremony for the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Despite this, Mark's primary motivation remains local and pastoral.

"My own church is now very diverse, having started as a brilliant congregation that was predominantly white and middle class. It has doubled in size in two years and has become more diverse racially and economically."

He is quick to correct assumptions that his parish is filled with Hong Kongers. "They are not the majority. My parish also includes many Urdu, Punjabi and Hindi speakers alongside more traditional Anglican congregations."

He adds with a smile: "I do not even speak Cantonese. My parents were born in the UK. But my calling has never been about advocating for one particular group. It has been about making people of all backgrounds feel welcome."

As Britain continues to receive new arrivals from Hong Kong, Mark's ministry stands as a signpost of what welcome can look like. Rooted in experience in Hong Kong, shaped by his heritage yet committed to serving all, he is helping the Church of England navigate one of the most dynamic chapters in its recent history.

For the thousands of Hong Kongers who now call Berkshire home, his presence signals something simple yet important.

They are seen. They are valued. They have a place in the life of the Church.

And, as Mark is the first to point out, this is only the beginning.



Revd Mark Nam at the first meeting of new steering group Hong Kongers in the Church of England

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Our Churches



St Oswald's is a 'mysterious, powerful and beautiful' church in an abandoned Medieval village in West Oxfordshire

St Oswald's Church in Widford, West Oxfordshire featured in a list of readers' worldwide favourite places of worship in *The Guardian* newspaper in December 2025.

The reader submission described it as: "Mysterious, beautiful and powerful."

St Oswald's stands in a field just to the west of the village of Swinbrook and to the east of the Cotswolds town of Burford.

The field's cropmarks show the outlines of former buildings from the abandoned Medieval village of Widford.

The church itself stands on the site of a Roman villa, and a small area of Roman mosaic from its chancel can now be viewed at the Corinium Museum in Cirencester.

St Oswald's is early English Gothic and was largely built in the 13th century, with remnants of an 11th-century building.

In the 14th century, a number of wall paintings were added, some of which survive (pictured).

Box pews from the 1700s are still in place.

Vivian H. H. Green, historian, priest and former



Rector of Lincoln College, Oxford, is buried in the churchyard.

The church is usually open to visitors throughout the year during daylight hours.

Make a day of it

The Swan pub in Swinbrook contains memorabilia relating to the socialite Mitford sisters, who grew up less than a mile to the east in Asthall Manor.

The beautiful Cotswold town of Burford is just a couple of miles away.

The church of St John the Baptist in Burford is a Grade I* listed building that welcomes more than 100,000 visitors each year, making it one of the ten most visited churches in the country.

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Thought Piece

WILLIAM WHYTE

considers the impact of the government's decision to abolish the Listed Places of Worship Scheme

Matthew 6:3 is an admirable verse about generosity. 'When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing'. It is perhaps a less helpful guide for good government. Let me explain...

On 22 January, the Department for Culture, Media & Sport published a report evaluating the Listed Places of Worship Scheme. Set up in 2001, this was a mechanism by which churches of particular architectural and heritage significance could reclaim the VAT paid on repairs.

The report concluded that it had worked extremely well, reaching almost all faith groups and sustaining almost all main building types.

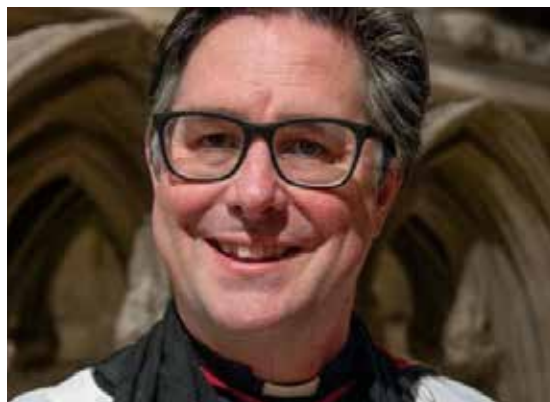
The administration was simple and the results impressive. It offered good value for money and had helped secure the future for around 12,800 buildings, 60% of eligible listed places of worship in the UK. It was, the report observed, a model for other schemes.

A day before, however, on 21 January, the Department for Culture, Media & Sport announced the abolition of the Listed Places of Worship Scheme. It is being replaced as part of a 'bumper £1.5 billion package to restore national pride'. Of this patriotic largesse, £92 million will be set aside for a Places of Worship Renewal Fund.

It sounds good until you examine the details.

Listed places of worship make up about 45% of our Grade I listed buildings and are getting six per cent of the funding announced.

Worse still, that funding has shrunk. From around 2012 until 2025, the Listed Places of Worship Scheme disbursed about £30 million a year. In 2025, that was dropped to £23 million: precisely the amount the new Places of Worship Renewal Fund will have to allocate each year. What



the government has done, in other words, is perpetuate its cut in funding and try to sell it as an increase.

Yet the evidence is already clear that this reduced sum is not enough. On 18 February – less than a month after the announcement of the 'package to restore national pride' – it was confirmed that the Listed Places of Worship Scheme had run out of cash and could make no further grants.

It may be the Places of Worship Renewal Fund will not itself struggle with that problem. Not least, the first round of applications was announced on 20 May with the deadline for expressions set for 14 June. How many churches will actually manage to get anything in on time remains to be seen.

Moreover, one of the virtues singled out in the government report into the Listed Places of Worship Scheme was its simplicity. The new scheme, as the Church of England has already pointed out, is more complex and bureaucratic. To apply, a church needs to fulfil several criteria that were absent in the old model. As a result, still fewer churches are likely to be helped.

To make matters worse, it also means repairs to churches are still liable for VAT. Demolition, by contrast is zero rated – though it is hard to see how that will 'restore national pride'.

Instead of Matthew 6:3, one prays it is not too late to hope the minister will be shown Haggai 1:4 and its enquiry about the fortunes of the Temple: 'Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses, while this house remains a ruin?'.

William Whyte is chair of Oxford's Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches

Bishop Richard Harries

Bishop of Oxford 1987-2006. Broadcaster and author

Richard Harries, whose years as Bishop of Oxford coincided with a period of profound change in church and society, combined intellectual distinction with a deep commitment to public engagement and pastoral care.

Known nationally as a thoughtful broadcaster and writer, he also played a leading role in shaping the Church of England's response to ethical, cultural and interfaith questions at the close of the 20th century.

For many, Bishop Richard was best known as one of the formative voices on BBC Radio 4's *Thought for the Day*, helping to establish it as a space where faith and public life could meet with seriousness and wit.

He once reflected that the task of offering the nation a moment of spiritual reflection each morning demanded significant and challenging levels of discipline and honesty.

Broadcasting, however, was arguably less demanding than episcopal leadership during a decade of significant transition, both within the church and in wider society.

Appointed Bishop of Oxford in 1987, he brought to the role a formidable theological mind and a conviction that the church must engage confidently with the moral questions of the day.

His episcopate was marked by a willingness to address complex and sometimes contentious issues openly, always seeking to hold together faithfulness to the gospel with compassion and reasoned debate.

While his views were often described as liberal, they reflected a broader concern for human dignity, justice and integrity in public life.

At various points, Bishop Richard spoke strongly about the place of gay people within society and the church, believing that open discussion was necessary in a changing cultural context.

These views, shared by many at the time though expressed less publicly by others, came during years of intense global Anglican debate.

Within the Diocese of Oxford, these conversations inevitably required careful pastoral navigation.

Bishop Richard consistently emphasised listening, restraint and the sustaining of common life across difference. Those who worked with him recall that, away from public controversy, his episcopal style was characterised by discretion, attentiveness and personal kindness.

Alongside these debates, Bishop Richard made significant contributions to diocesan life. He encouraged theological seriousness among clergy, supported lay ministry and took a close interest in education and parish renewal.

One of the early bishops to ordain women following the General Synod's decision in 1992, he worked pastorally to ensure that differing convictions were respected as the church adapted to change.

Beyond the diocese, Bishop Richard became one of the Church of England's most respected public intellectuals.

He served as adviser on interfaith relations to the Archbishop of Canterbury and was particularly

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His contributions were marked by clarity, intellectual care and a consistent attempt to articulate a Christian moral perspective



Bishop Richard's portrait in Church House

committed to deepening Christian-Jewish understanding.

As chairman of the Council of Christians and Jews from 1992 to 2001, he strengthened its public profile and theological seriousness, urging Christians to recognise Judaism as a living faith in its own right.

In the religiously diverse context of Oxfordshire, he also supported constructive relationships with Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and other faith communities.

Social justice was another consistent thread. With responsibility for an area that included the Campsfield House immigration detention centre, Bishop Richard spoke publicly for the humane treatment of asylum seekers and refugees.

Earlier in his episcopate, he was involved in efforts urging ethical scrutiny of church investments related to apartheid-era South Africa, contributing to the long-term development of the Church Commissioners' ethical investment policies.

After retiring as Bishop of Oxford in 2006, he continued his public service in the House of Lords, where he sat as a life peer. There, few church figures were as active or respected across parties.

Bishop Richard spoke on a wide range of issues, including medical ethics, housing, education and constitutional reform, serving on bodies such as the Royal Commission on House of Lords reform and the Nuffield Council on Bioethics.

His contributions were marked by clarity, intellectual care and a consistent attempt to articulate a Christian moral perspective within a plural society.

Born in 1936 in Eltham, south London, the son of Brigadier William Harries and Greta Harries, his early life was shaped by frequent moves, including time in the United States.

Educated at Wellington College, he initially followed a military path, training at Sandhurst and serving in Germany. It was during these years that he experienced a gradual but decisive vocation to ordained ministry, despite having had little formal religious upbringing.

Leaving the army in 1958, he studied theology at Selwyn College, Cambridge, before training for ordination at Ripon College Cuddesdon under Robert Runcie.

His early ministry included a long curacy at Hampstead Parish Church and later service at Wells Theological College, where he began his scholarly work on just war theory.

As vicar of All Saints, Fulham, and later as Dean of King's College London, he combined parish leadership with teaching, writing and broadcasting.

A prolific author, Bishop Richard wrote more than 50 books and countless articles, making complex theology accessible to a wide audience.

Physically active into later life, he enjoyed swimming, walking and tennis, maintaining a disciplined routine that reflected his wider approach to life and faith.

He married Josephine Bottomley in 1963. She survives him, as do their son Mark and daughter Clare. In retirement, the couple lived in Barnes, where Bishop Richard continued to serve quietly as an assistant bishop in the Diocese of Southwark and as a parish priest.

In his later writing and preaching, Bishop Richard often returned to themes of creativity, vocation and shared responsibility.

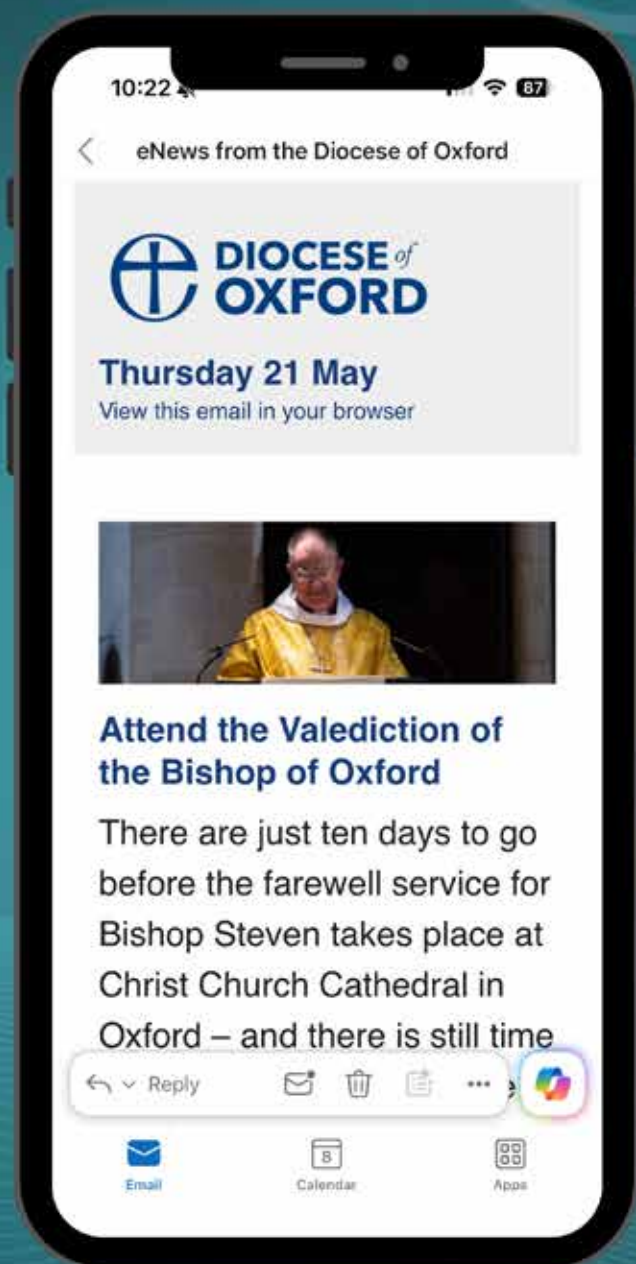
In one of his final sermons, he spoke of humanity's calling to be "co-creators with God", shaping lives and communities with care and imagination – a phrase that many felt captured both his theology and his ministry.

Richard Harries will be remembered in the Diocese of Oxford and far beyond as a bishop who took ideas seriously, cared deeply for people, and believed that the Christian tradition had both the resources and the responsibility to speak thoughtfully into the public life of the nation.

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Bishop's Advent Appeal



The Advent Appeal raised £19,500 for our link diocese in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands after Hurricane Melissa

The diocesan link between Oxford and the Diocese of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands might be young but it has already shaped a generous response to crisis.

Formed in 2024, it was the first partnership of its kind between any Church of England diocese and a diocese in the West Indies.

The link grew from shared commitments around justice, young people and the environment, as well as from the deep ties many people in Oxfordshire hold with the Caribbean through the Windrush generation and more recent migration.

That connection took on urgent meaning after Hurricane Melissa struck Jamaica last October.

The storm caused catastrophic damage during a period when many communities were still repairing homes, schools and churches after Hurricane Beryl in 2024.

Melissa left 95 dead and diocesan authorities estimate that more than 100 churches, halls and clergy houses were damaged or destroyed. Fifty church school buildings were also affected.

It was against this backdrop that the Bishop's Advent Appeal for 2025 focused on supporting the Diocese of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands.

The appeal raised a total of £19,516.02, with £7,856.23 coming from individuals and £11,659.79 from churches.

The Advent Appeal formed part of a larger wave of support that ran through the diocese. People with personal links to Jamaica have played a central role.

The diocese's diversity adviser, the Revd Polly Falconer, helped bring together an Upholding Service with the Jamaica Society in Reading and several churches joined in sending Barrels of Hope filled with practical supplies for communities recovering from the storm.

Although the diocesan link is still new, the response to Hurricane Melissa shows the strength of the bond already forming. It is a partnership rooted in shared faith and resilient compassion, ready to grow through both celebration and challenge.

Honours List



Jayne Ozanne, left, and Anne Dellar have received an OBE and MBE respectively

LGBTQIA+ campaigner and founder of Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust are among those honoured by King Charles

JAYNE OZANNE has been awarded an OBE for services to religion and the LGBTQIA+ community.

Jayne, who now lives in Guernsey, has been a campaigner for LGBTQIA+ rights and a ban on conversion therapy for many years.

Jayne served as one of our diocesan representatives on General Synod for two periods, latterly from 2015 until her resignation in 2024.

She has served the Church in many ways, including as a member of the Archbishops' Council, the Diocese of Oxford Bishop's Council and the Diocesan Synod.

Jayne said: "I am deeply humbled to be honoured in this way.

"It is critical we do all we can to highlight the harm that LGBT+ people tragically face when they are told that who they are is unacceptable as it causes

deep psychological trauma due to unbearable levels of self-hatred and shame."

Meanwhile, **ANNE DELLAR** has been made an MBE for services to education.

Anne joined the diocese in 2011 as the director of education.

In that role she was instrumental in founding the Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust and in 2012 left the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education for the multi-academy trust (MAT).

Today it operates as one of the largest diocesan MATs in the country and the largest MAT in terms of number of schools in Oxfordshire and Berkshire. Anne retired as chief executive last summer.

Anne said: "It's encouraging when our society recognises and values the work we do in education. Children matter!"

Our Prayer

*A prayer for the Diocese of Oxford
during Vacancy in See:*

God of gentleness and love

Draw near to us as we draw near to you.

Dwell in every heart and conversation.

*Fashion in us the likeness of your Son, Jesus
Christ.*

*Help us to discern together all that you are calling
us to be*

and all that you are calling us to do.

*Assist us, by your Spirit, to become a more
contemplative,*

*more compassionate and more courageous church,
for the building of your kingdom and the glory of
your Son.*

Amen





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