

St Mary's, Watford

St Mary's News

December 2023 and January 2024



Includes

Using Advent and Christmas to think about Mission
The War in Gaza
Mission Action Plan
Fairtrade

... and much more!

Using Advent and Christmas to think about Mission



Similar to the season of Lent, Advent is a period in the Church year that invites us to prepare spiritually for one of the major Christian festivals. Lent is often taken more seriously; many of us will fast or give up something for Lent

or perhaps adopt an additional spiritual discipline to draw closer to God. Whilst we may share bible study as a group, Lent tends to be personal and very much focussed on our own journey of faith with a resolve to improve certain areas of our lives as we seek to follow Christ to the best of our ability. Advent has a very different feel. For a start it has to compete with the busyness of this time of year. With so many social occasions leading up to Christmas it is hardly the time to fast and abstain from those things we might give up in Lent.

For the purist amongst us we often bemoan how Christmas seems to come earlier each year, and certainly Christmas decorations and shops seem to be stocked with seasonal items from early November, if not before. We often find ourselves under pressure to spend more than we can afford. For many it takes the next few months paying off credit card bills and other loans. It is an anathema that in our world today the pressure to spend beyond our means at Christmas causes many to go into debt. It conflicts with our understanding of Jesus coming into the world to bring us freedom from all forms of captivity including debt.

It is just one example of how the true meaning of Christmas clashes with many of the world's values. The season of Advent invites us to reflect on the fundamental differences between the values of this world and that of Jesus' message and the coming of

his heavenly kingdom. As the Christmas story is told and retold many times during this period, we reflect on the manner in which Jesus enters our human world. There is no room at the inn, which in itself is scandalous given this is a part of the world that prides itself on hospitality. Jesus is born into scandal and shame. He is born amongst the animals and laid in a manger. Jesus is born into poverty. He is also born into a land that is occupied by a foreign power. He is born amongst people who are largely spiritually blind. Only a handful of shepherds and a few wise men from the East pay homage at the birth of the Christ Child. He is also born into a place of persecution and terror under the reign of King Herod - the slaughter of innocents. Jesus and his parents become refugees. Throughout his earthly ministry Jesus is confronted by all kinds of hardships: poverty, hunger, sickness and oppression.

One of the most compelling images in the recent conflict in Gaza is that of a Palestinian woman holding her dying adult son and next to it an image of a religious painting showing Mary holding the body of Jesus after he had been taken down off the cross. The conflict in Gaza is complex and deep rooted (*please see the statement from the Archbishops on this very sensitive issue. It is printed in this edition of St. Mary's News*). In so many ways Gaza is a reflection of the many problems in our broken world that is in desperate need of healing. Whether it is famine in Africa, floods in India, the existential threat of climate change, wars, harsh political regimes, terrorism, greed and corruption on a large scale, the world is crying out in pain.

During Advent we light the candles on the Advent wreath symbolising Hope, Peace, Joy, Love and Light. As Christians we firmly believe that in Christ, we have been given these things and that Jesus truly



is the Light of the World. I think Advent is a great opportunity to reflect on how our faith informs the way we see the world. A world in desperate need but at the same time in Christ there is hope. The true light that shines in the darkness.



We look to God for answers. God looks to us to be his co-workers. In St. Matthew's Gospel we read of Jesus going from village to village in the region of Galilee. 'When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were

harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'" (*Matthew 9-36-38*) "Mission," Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, would say, "is finding out what God is doing and joining in." Currently the PCC are engaged in the process of developing a new MAP or Mission Action Plan. A MAP is not a comprehensive list of everything a church does under the banner of mission but identifies where our priorities should lie as we discern the direction of travel for a church. In other words where is God leading us? What is God asking of us? What do we need to do to be the church God wants us to be? How might we share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others and be a beacon of hope in this broken world?

You will see from Marcus Jones' report found in this edition of St. Mary's News the progress we have made with the new MAP. It suggests a vision statement which reflects our desire to be inclusive and welcoming to all people, so that through fellowship and prayer, through the study of scripture and through our worship, St. Mary's is a safe place to ask questions and to learn from one another and deepen our faith in Jesus Christ. When the PCC set

aside time to listen to God and develop our thinking on the MAP, we felt God was asking us to adopt the very familiar verse from Micah to 'act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.' (*Micah 6:8*) The values listed in the report reflect our commitment to this verse. Please do take time to read the report and please do make comment. God doesn't just speak to one or two people but to the whole church because he wants us to journey together and to work together to build a better world which is based on the Hope, Peace, Joy and Love that Jesus brings into our world.

The Revd Tony Rindl



Parochial Church Council

The following report summarises some of the matters considered at the Council's meeting of 27th November.

Finance: The draft Budget for 2024 showed that we are heading for an estimated deficit of around £33,000 next year. The Council was advised that, given significant deficits from previous years, this situation was unsustainable, and St Mary's would use up its reserves within two years if this situation continued. With a view to sale, the Council decided unanimously to seek advice about placing the vacant property at Brightwell Road on the market, invest the proceeds and ringfence the interest for the General Fund. This would bring in more income than merely renting out the property and save St Mary's running costs on the property. It would also cover most, if not all, general expenditure and ensure our long-term sustainability. The decision was in line with advice given to the Council in January by Colin Bird, Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance.

It was still not possible to fix a date for an Annual Parochial Church Meeting to present the 2022 Accounts to the congregation because some issues remained outstanding. The Bishop has been advised.

PCC Membership: Anthony Wilson, who will be Joint Treasurer from 1st December, was co-opted onto the Council.

Buildings: The Council approved a Faculty for the repainting of the clock faces on the tower.

Policies: The Safeguarding Policy was updated, and a Policy on Short Term Room Hire was approved.

Same Sex Unions: The Council noted that on 15th November the General Synod approved the introduction, on a trial basis, of special services of prayer and dedication asking for God's blessing for same-sex couples. For the present, Canon Law remains unchanged.

ECO Church: The Diocese of St Albans has been awarded a Bronze ECO Church Award. Its website had dedicated an entire page to St Mary's Climate Services in September and our Bronze and Silver awards.

Mission Action Plan (MAP): The MAP Working Group (Roger Courtney, Tilly Elliott, Marcus Jones, Caroline Jones, Martin Whittick) had drawn up a Vision Statement and sets of Values and Aims for St Mary's which were supported by the Council. It will now draw up specific objectives and begin the consultation process with the congregation (*see detailed article on the MAP in this edition*).

Hygiene: Action will be taken to improve hygiene in the kitchen.

Once approved, full minutes are normally available on the St Mary's website: <https://www.stmaryswatford.org/pcc>

If you wish to send correspondence to the PCC please send it to the PCC Secretary, Marcus Jones (email: ttekcos@aol.com).

Marcus Jones
PCC Secretary

Statement from the House of Bishops on the war in Gaza

31/10/2023

An appeal for Peace

“They shall not learn war any more” (Isaiah 2.4)

Isaiah’s vision of peace was spoken to a nation in confusion and social discord, divided and fearful. It was a vision of a peace that, though not yet realised, was always to be sought in faith through living in obedient righteousness and generous community in society. It is repeated numerous times in both the Old Testament and in the New as the ultimate destiny of creation, a state of peace, righteousness and harmony. As Christians we believe that the fulfilment of this vision and the gift of peace, individually and collectively, is found in Jesus Christ.

The War in Israel and Gaza

As Bishops of the Church of England we condemn the terrorist actions of Hamas on 7th October. Hamas has killed civilians without mercy, defiled their bodies, treated the most vulnerable brutally and taken hostages. Its continued indiscriminate rocket attacks against Israeli targets puts civilian structures and individuals at risk. All this is built on its denial of the right of Israel to exist. Hamas has oppressed the people it was originally elected to serve and has put them in harm’s way by using them as human shields. Its actions are a violation of international law.

We must also reflect on the actions that Israel has taken in response. We affirm absolutely Israel’s right to self-defence. We wholly support the duty of the Government of Israel to protect its citizens. We echo the concerns raised by President Biden about understandable anger and deep trauma not determining strategy

and actions. Israel's right to self-defence needs to be exercised in adherence to the key principles of international humanitarian law.

The huge number of civilians killed in three weeks of bombardment, principally in Gaza City, and the immense suffering of a people herded south with no escape, are a humanitarian catastrophe. Even defined evacuation routes have been hit. Places of sanctuary and gathering have been bombed. Aid workers have been killed and wounded in large numbers. Critical services like healthcare, water, and electricity have been cut, while the military siege of Gaza has meant that no adequate humanitarian response has been possible.

Also gravely concerning are the reports of rising numbers of Palestinians killed in the West Bank by inhabitants of settlements which are illegal under international law. In mixed communities in Israel, where people have generally lived peacefully side by side, Israeli Arabs now find themselves subject to abuse, harassment and discrimination.

The United Kingdom, Islamophobia and antisemitism

In this country we have seen heightened tensions and threats to social cohesion. We are grateful for and stand with all those faith and community leaders who have made efforts at local and national level to maintain friendships and relationships across some of the sharpening political divides. We also condemn the rise in antisemitic and Islamophobic attacks.

Appeals by the Bishops of the Church of England

In the UK we call for intercommunity groups to maintain the closest possible contact. We pledge ourselves to pray for and take public actions in support of our fellow citizens of Jewish or Islamic faith. We recognise that within the church, too, we must acknowledge our own differences on this matter with care and generosity.

The way individuals and communities act here and now could shape and influence what happens next. So, while we must condemn utterly those who foster fear and hatred in our communities, we must also galvanise and support those who are modelling something different and seeking the way of peace.

Recognising the troubled history, we nevertheless cling to the longstanding vision of a peaceful region where the peoples of Israel and Palestine can live in security, justice, peace and harmony in their own lands, we therefore appeal:

- For Hamas to release all hostages unconditionally and unharmed.
- For immediate humanitarian pauses that will enable the wounded and the most vulnerable to be evacuated under ICRC or UN supervision, holding out hope for a ceasefire in the longer term.
- For safe areas to be established across Gaza with communications, food, water and medical support, under international supervision.
- For the Israeli Government to protect the population of the Occupied Territories and arrest anyone threatening them, without fear or favour.
- For all parties to this conflict to adhere to international humanitarian law and to take all necessary steps to minimise harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure.

We unite ourselves with the Anglican Archbishop in Jerusalem, Hosam Naoum, and Christian leaders in the Holy Land in calling for sustained and faithful prayer by all Christians for peace and justice.

World Day of Prayer

"I beg you, bear with one another in love"



Poignantly it would seem - some six years ago PALESTINE was invited to write the WDP Service for 2024. This was seen as an opportunity to reflect on continuing challenging times, encouraging Palestinian Christian women to keep searching for a deeper understanding among all the people who share the land, trusting for and hoping in the humanity of one another.

The Christian Women of Palestine are calling us to connect with the land from where Jesus came; where he was born, ministered and died – and from where our faith began and is rooted. Despite living in an area of the world where there is ongoing conflict and the future is uncertain, the Christian women of Palestine are sharing with love a reminder that they are there, and they want to give hope to everyone. The theme of the service in 2024 ‘bear with one another in love’ seems very appropriate for these women who will not give up witnessing to the love of Jesus Christ.

You are warmly invited to join us for:

Bible Study

led by Dr Jean Stevenson at 2.00pm on **Friday 2nd February 2024**, studying and praying for the situation in Palestine.

The Service

at 2.00pm on **Friday 1st March 2024**

Both will be held at **The Scroll Church**, The Harebreaks (formerly North Watford Methodist) - parking is available in the Public Car Park opposite the Church.

Lifting in Prayer by Carole Bourne

*Loving God,
Creator and keeper of all
we lift to you the Christian women of the Holy Land:
their challenges, hopes and fears.
As you shaped and guided your church in this place, Lord,
we pray that you would direct and protect all who call on you,
giving them hope and courage
in the face of danger, loss and challenge.
We pray in Jesus' name.
Amen*

If you are able, please come to pray for Palestine.

*Further details from
Rosemary Clemas & Jackie Mee*



The 2024 Mission Action Plan

A Mission Action Plan (MAP) is a document which outlines and develops a church's vision for the future, and the practical steps the church community intends to take towards achieving those goals. Developing a MAP provides a way to make sure the life and work of our church is purposeful, forward-thinking and focussed. The St Alban's Diocese encourages every church to review its MAP, a process that begins with the Parochial Church Council (PCC) and involves the whole congregation.

St Mary's last MAP was drawn up in 2014 and was reasonably successful at achieving its objectives. The church was refurbished and re-opened in 2019. Connect Groups were re-launched and for a time membership increased to the MAP goal of 50-60, although subsequently it fell back to 30-40. Worship and children's work were developed. A number of the congregation had been accepted for ministry, including some from ethnic backgrounds.

A new MAP process was begun in 2019 but was interrupted by the pandemic. The PCC re-started the process in October with an 'Away Day' to consider our vision and plan in the post pandemic world we find ourselves in. Some useful principles and ideas were discussed, and a key conclusion was that Micah 6.8 best reflects what we want to be at the present time: to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God. A MAP Working Group (Roger Courtney, Tilly Elliott, Martin Whittick, Marcus & Caroline Jones) was set up to take the work forward by drawing up a revised Vision Statement and Values. The Working Group's conclusions were put to the PCC in November and supported.

Vision statement

The suggested Vision Statement is:

Valuing everyone and led by our passion for Christ, we aim to bring God's love to all in Watford through our worship, welcome and witness.

This covers our concern to be inclusive; that we want to be inspired and compelled by the love of Christ in all we do (2 Corinthians 5.14); that we see God's love as the central message of the Gospel; and that we want to demonstrate that love dynamically through our worship, our welcome of all who come to us, our evangelism and our social action including tackling the climate emergency.

Values

Bearing in mind Micah 6.8, our values might be:

- i. Bible based worship and teaching which acknowledges the greatness and grace of God in Christ (humility)*
- ii. Diversity in social status, ethnicity etc (mercy)*
- iii. Equality of gender, sexuality, race, culture etc (justice)*
- iv. Forgiveness and reconciliation (mercy)*
- v. Equality of opportunity/social justice (justice)*
- vi. The protection of God's creation (humility)*
- vii. The heritage of our ancient building as a tangible symbol of God's presence in Watford now and over the generations (humility)*

Value (i) describes our present church life in terms of the type of worship and teaching we prize. *Values (ii)* and *(iii)* reflect not only that we value our diversity as a congregation but that we should also expect to be treated equally. It was recognized that the third value was broad and not without limit in some circumstances; but nevertheless, it expressed a clear principle. It was also recognised that there are other categories/groups (e.g. disabled, neuro-diverse) which are included in UK Equal Opportunities legislation and could be included in the list, but the most common examples have been listed without excluding other categories/groups. *Value (iv)* reflects that we value being accountable to one another in a way that is consistent with the grace, mercy and love of Christ. *Values (v)* and

(vi) are specifically outward facing and are about the values we want to project to the wider community in Watford. *Value (vii)* is about acknowledging the gift God has given to us in the heritage we have in our church building and its prominent location. It is not about the building itself but rather the fact that it speaks about God to Watford, as it has done through the generations, and is a sacred place where people encounter him.

Aims

These values have to be turned into practical aims we want to achieve as a church and listed in the MAP. These might be:

- i. To engage and embed our community in the whole life of the church*
- ii. To ensure that our worship and activities are meaningful to our diverse worshipping community*
- iii. To be more visible to the community outside our doors*
- iv. To project our values and concerns - notably about climate change - more widely, showing that we share the concerns of those around irrespective of their beliefs*
- v. To create constructive relationships with groups that share those concerns and, as appropriate, provide a focus within the community for them*

These aims form a progressive, linked narrative. As the congregation becomes more engaged in St Mary's by taking a more active role in its worship, management, Connect Groups etc under *Aims (i)* and *(ii)*, it should find itself more able to engage with the wider Watford community. *Aim (iii)* forms the bridge between St Mary's and that wider community as the initial stage of development which leads in turn to *Aims (iv)* and *(v)* of projecting our values out into the wider community and building relationships with partners who share our values.

The Aims can be summarised by three Ps: *Participation* (Aims i and ii), *Projection* (Aims iii and iv), and *Partnership* (Aim v).

Next Steps

The PCC has asked the Working Group to identify two or three SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely) objectives under each of the 3P headings and to begin a consultation process with the congregation to ensure that everyone is given an opportunity to contribute to and actively support these.

Your ideas are important to us. If you have any comments about the Vision Statement, Values or Aims, please speak to a member of the Working Group or email them to Marcus Jones (ttekcos@aol.com).

Marcus Jones

Watford Interfaith Pilgrimage



On Sunday 19th November, we assembled at St Mary's Parish Church where pilgrims were greeted by the vicar, Revd Tony Rindl, and the High Sheriff of Hertfordshire, Liz Green, spoke of how she was looking forward to this event of faiths walking together

especially as these times are so difficult for some. Mayor Peter Taylor, who is patron of Watford Interfaith Association (WIFA) spoke about the importance of bringing people of different backgrounds together. Watford Town Centre Chaplain Geert Tap also spoke of the need for peace, Cllr Mark Watkin mentioned the importance of encouraging children's religious education, as leader

of the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education in Hertfordshire and Harjit Singh, chair of WIFA reminded everyone of how important it is to all work together. Revd Rindl spoke about several aspects of this ancient church, the oldest building in Watford, and how worship takes place there.

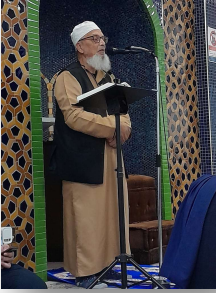
Seventy or so people moved off to the next venue, the Al-Zahra centre, the only Shi'a Muslim Mosque for 20 miles around. Azhar Shah, president and Azhar Abedi, the interfaith officer spoke about how this branch of Islam arose and how the mosque has slowly become much more open to visitors of all faiths and none. Questions were answered, and refreshed, the party moved on to Beechen Grove Baptist Church.



This was a first time for this interesting church, but when the pilgrims arrived to everyone's surprise the church was full to capacity (about 1,000 people) for a Romanian wedding. Here the pilgrims were kindly allowed to walk down the centre aisle as the large brass band played some melodies, and past the happy couple who were about to be wed. Minister, Revd Simon Heard told us that the church regularly holds eight different services every

Sunday in various parts of the building.

The pilgrims filed back through the shopping centre en route for the Central Mosque. Once seated on the plush carpets (and a



few chairs) the pilgrims were treated to the beautiful singing of the muezzin's call to prayer from Mr Esoof, which was then translated into English. Cllr Asif Khan also said a few words. Questions about Islam (this time the Sunni branch) were answered, some refreshments were offered and then it was time to put shoes on again and walk the final stretch to the Gurdwara.

All were welcomed in the sanctuary, and again were seated on lush carpets, Harminder Singh spoke about the tenets of Sikhism, and questions were answered before being invited to file past the priest under the canopy who was using his whisk to keep the words of the Guru Granth Sahib holy book clean and fresh. Downstairs a martial arts gatka lesson was in full swing, and the teacher spoke about how Sikhs will always defend right and the downtrodden, which is why they learn these fighting techniques. This was followed by a delicious vegetarian meal and thus this pilgrimage drew to a close.

Numbers had swelled to around 100 in places. The High Sheriff roundly thanked everyone for the day, and the organisers, especially Francoise Murphy who had worked out the logistics among other things, and the stewards Sri Mohan and Francoise Battin, and members of all the places of worship who had made everyone feel so very welcome. A warm sense of friendship between everyone was very tangible.



Judith Bruni
Watford Interfaith Association
(printed with permission)

St Mary's is a Fairtrade Church!



We have renewed St Mary's as a Fairtrade Church because St Mary's uses at least three Fairtrade products regularly. Tea, coffee and drinking chocolate, with sugar and biscuits as well.

St Mary's also promotes Fairtrade during Fairtrade Fortnight, which next year will be 9th to 22nd September 2024. This is much later in the year than usual.

St Mary's also encourages the congregation to buy Fairtrade products when they can. Fairtrade products are not usually much more expensive than non-Fairtrade, but it is a matter of looking to see that products have the Fairtrade Mark on the packaging. That guarantees the producer farmers in developing countries are being paid a fair and sustainable price for their produce. They can then put food on their families' tables, send their children to school, access healthcare facilities and clean water.

Fairtrade is mentioned in prayers, the Fairtrade Mark is printed at the top of the Sunday Notice Sheet and St Mary's Eco Church scheme includes promotion of Fairtrade.



What is “Shared Interest” all about?

(An ethical investment)

If one has some funds you wish to invest ethically then Shared Interest investment company may be worth exploring.

- Shared Interest Society is an ethically-based savings company. They make loans to Fairtrade Cooperatives around the world. The loans currently total over £50M annually.
- Fairtrade Cooperatives repay their loans, and the interest incurred goes back into the general funds and is shared, which means your investment capital remains constant. You share your interest with the company.
- Since 1990, Shared Interest has enabled millions of people across the world to grow their businesses, creating thriving communities.
- Over 11,000 investors share a vision of a world where justice is at the heart of trade finance.
- Shared Interest Finance lend to farmers and handcraft producers to help them trade their way out of poverty.
- The Shared Interest Foundation provides practical support to Fairtrade businesses through training and local support networks.

YOU can change lives across the globe by investing in a Share Account. See the Shared Interest website for more information:

<https://www.shared-interest.com/gb>

Brian Mee is happy to answer any questions about Shared Interest

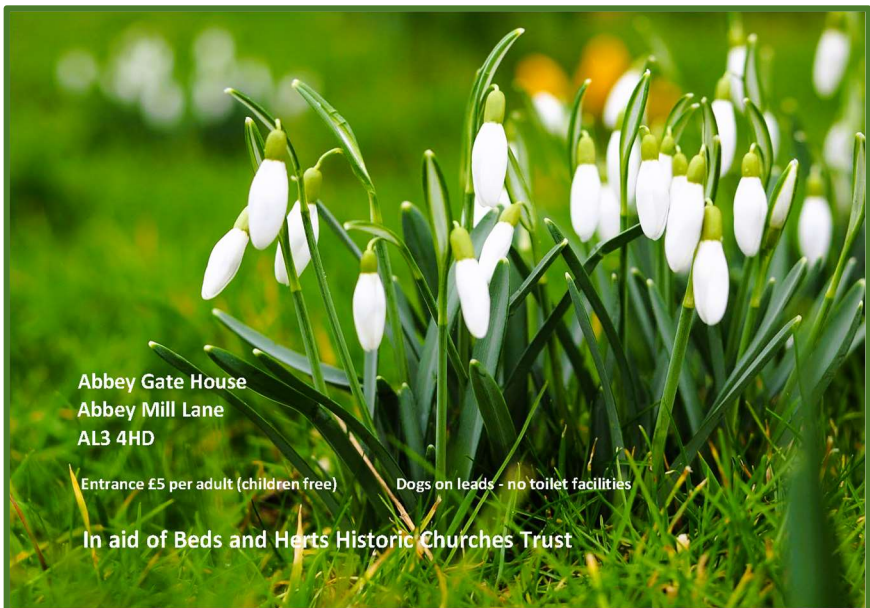
Bishop of St Albans Open Garden

The Bishop of St Albans will be opening his garden on four Sundays in February and March for people to come and look at the display of snowdrops. Those who came to visit in the summer will know that the garden is delightful, it also has an appeal to visitors in the spring as the snowdrops herald the end of winter.

The two acres of garden is an oasis in central St Albans and only open to the public on selected Sundays in the spring and the summer.

Spring opening days are Sundays 18th February, 25th February, 3rd March and 10th March. Entrance is £5 per person (children free) and dogs on leads are welcome.

Footwear suitable for the time of year is advised.



A snapshot of St Mary's, Watford

brought to you by Churches Together in Watford



In September at a special Creation-tide Service, St Mary's was presented with both Bronze and Silver Eco-Church awards (run by A Rocha UK). The Church Climate Group has worked to reduce carbon footprints of both the church building and personal carbon footprints of congregation members.

Services now include mention of climate and how we can all help to mitigate the existential threat.

Our Vicar, Tony, runs a regular Iranian Farsi speaking Bible study.

Every Tuesday the Watford and Three Rivers Refugee Partnership offers help to those with immigration issues. An immigration lawyer attends monthly to give pro bono advice. The Social Hub offers refreshments, clothing, toiletries, singing and a variety of other activities, including nail and hair, medical and psychological advice and support. ESOL classes are held to help improve standards of English for refugees.

Free lunchtime concerts on most Thursdays offer an eclectic range of music by local musicians, including students from the Purcell School.

The Ukrainian Group is led and supported by Luther Blissett and his partner Lauren. They are organising a world class concert in December.

In November the Watford Interfaith Pilgrimage and the Remembrance Day Civic Parade both started from St Mary's.



Services

The Church is usually open each week
Monday to Friday between 9.30am and 3.00pm
and on Saturday between 9.30am and 2.00pm

Sunday

9.00am Holy Communion (said) in church
every Sunday
10.30am Morning Service in church and via Zoom
every Sunday
5.30pm Encounter in church
on last Sunday of month only
(preceded at 5.00pm with refreshments)

Wednesday

12.30pm Holy Communion in church

(for Zoom links please contact the Church Office)

Thought for the Week

on our website - based on a bible verse or passage,
it is a short reflection by one of the leadership team
for you to think about during the week.
It can be downloaded and listened to whenever and wherever.

Please keep up to date with what is on offer
via our Facebook page, Instagram
or the website www.stmaryswatford.org

Who's Who at St Mary's

Vicar

The Revd Tony Rindl
01923 225189 / 07792 505480
tony.rindl@gmail.com

Churchwardens

Peter Dean
07876 154387
peter.dean@stmaryswatford.org
Eileen Roby
07479 846544
eileen.robby@stmaryswatford.org

Facilities Manager

stmarysfacilitiesmanager@gmail.com

Church Office

office@stmaryswatford.org
St Mary's Church, Church Street,
Watford WD18 0EG
01923 225189

Parish Safeguarding Officer

Lesley Gray
stmaryssafeguarding10@gmail.com

www.stmaryswatford.org