

# St Mary's News

October 2021



## *Includes ....*

Wherever we go, God is with us – the Revd Tony Rindl

The Beauty of Diversity – the Revd Joshua Brocklesby

Testimonies - Daniella and Daniel

*.... and much more!*

## Wherever we go, God is with us



Psalm 139 is a familiar psalm for many of us, and for good reason, as it contains so many words of comfort and hope. There is something very reassuring as the psalmist describes the extent to which God knows us. ‘He perceives my thoughts from afar.’ (verse 2) And ‘familiar with all my ways’ (verse 3) And ‘Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely.’ (verse 4) Perhaps the most poignant of all: ‘For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.’ (verse 13) ‘Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.’ (verse 16) It is an incredible thought; God seeing the entirety of our lives even before we are born.

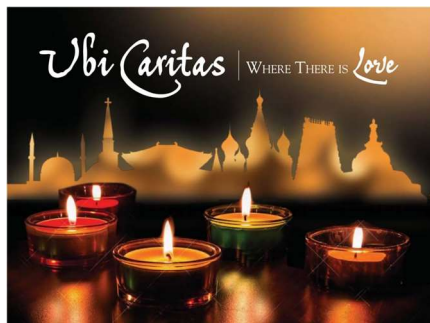
I am grateful to Cathy for choosing this passage when she was asked to lead prayers before our recent PCC meeting and in doing so reminding us of what an important passage of scripture this psalm is, especially in the uncertain times we are living in. As we seek to find our way out of this pandemic and revert to a more normal way of life it is so reassuring that no matter what path we take, or direction we travel, God will know our thoughts and will search us out. It is incredible to think that it is impossible for us to escape from God’s love: ‘Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.’ (verses 7-10) What a truly wonderful promise that is. Furthermore, no matter how dark or difficult our circumstances might be God can help us overcome our problems. ‘If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,” even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you’ (verses 11,12).

How wonderfully reassuring this is as we take these first tentative steps, finding our way out of the pandemic, knowing that God is with us. In fact, we cannot escape from him even if we go to highest heavens, or make our bed in the depths, or travel to the far side of the sea, God is with us. After all we are pilgrim people. We are on a journey of faith.

Life never stands still. As one famous football manager once said, 'to stand still means to be left behind.' Even at the height of the pandemic, when we were enduring the long days of lockdown, life did not stand still. Indeed, some members of St. Mary's even managed to move house during this period.

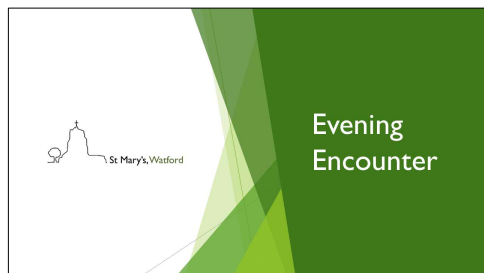
If life does not stand still, if the world is constantly changing, then the Church needs to move with the times. It doesn't take much imagination to realise that the Church looks very different to what it did as it began life in 1st Century Jerusalem. From the very beginning when Paul and Barnabas parted company the Church has moved in many different directions, and we know that there are many different denominations around the world. We even promote the idea of Fresh Expressions of Church, legitimate new ways of being church as we seek to reach new people with the love of God.

There is a famous old hymn, *Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est*, which is often sung at Maundy Thursday during re-enactments of Jesus washing his disciples' feet. The Latin translates *Where charity and love are, there God is*. It is my sincere belief that wherever Christians meet to worship and to pray and have fellowship and where there is genuine love for one another, and reaching out and serving the community around them, then God is surely present, no matter what tradition or style of worship is offered.



Even a casual look at the history of St. Mary's would suggest it is a church that has changed much in its 800-year history. Even in the eight years I have

been at St. Mary's there have been many changes, the most obvious one being the refurbishment of the church building. As we worshipped in the church centre, whilst the building work took place there was genuine excitement as we anticipated the transformation of the building. I think we were helped by various artist's impressions of what the new interior would look like. We could visualise the changes, but even so there was a definite wow factor when the church reopened.



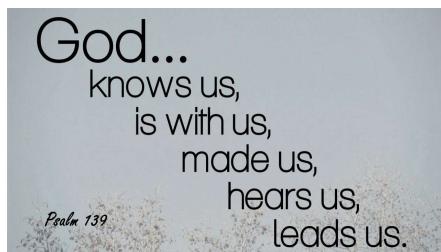
It is perhaps worth pausing and asking ourselves what our vision for St. Mary's might be, as we emerge out of the pandemic and look forward to the future. In many ways it is harder for us to visualise what St. Mary's might look like in the future, but we begin with an

understanding of ourselves. What is our understanding of what it means to be made in the image of God? How might St. Mary's continue to worship and enjoy God, inviting others to do so too? Hopefully you will be aware of our new evening service on the first Sunday of the month at the new time of 5.30 (come early for refreshment and to mingle with others). The purpose of the service is precisely for us to encounter Jesus in new and exciting ways in order to worship and enjoy God and to invite others to join in. It is not a new service for a different congregation. It is for us to be greater equipped in our core activity.

Of course, we are also called to be present, and to serve our wider community, and work with God for the building of his Kingdom. Recently Bishop Michael spoke to members of the PCC and Connect Group Leaders and encouraged us to consider a different approach. Learning from the experiences of Tearfund who, working with local churches in Africa and capitalising on the limited resources available, have sought to work in partnership with others who have a shared vision for how they would transform the community around them. In other words, work with others in a shared concern for our communities, recognizing that they too are made in God's image.

I am mindful of Archbishop Rowan Williams who said mission is finding out what God is doing and joining in. There are many great organisations and community groups in Watford serving our community well. Many of them such as New Hope, Watford and Three Rivers Refugee Partnership, Town Centre Chaplaincy, Women's Centre are using our facilities, which is wonderful, but do we truly partner with them? Perhaps our shared concern for the welfare of others will lead us to greater partnership work. Perhaps then we will be seen in the town not as custodians of a lovely historic building but a vibrant community and a legitimate expression of God's love.

Let's us take courage as we venture forward knowing that in the words of that great psalm wherever we go God is with us. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows what we are capable of, what our full potential is.



Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.

See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

*(Psalm 139 verses 23 and 24)*



*The Revd Tony Rindl*

# The Beauty of Diversity

I was very fortunate in August to have a break and go abroad. Now, there were not many options due to the numerous and different travel restrictions in place for most countries but it was possible to visit Spain without too much extra hassle and so I decided to go and spend some time in Andalucía, specifically Seville and Granada.



I chose those cities because as well as having sunny weather, it was around 35 C every day, they were fascinating to me historically. Many perhaps don't realise that between 711 and 1492 southern Spain and at times most of Spain itself were under the control of Islamic

rulers. And so, it meant that during this time Muslims, Christians and Jews lived together in cities, towns and villages. It was mostly a vibrant time, and it led to a beautiful culture and architecture which can be experienced when you visit. The royal palaces and old buildings can have stunning Islamic architecture and art in one room with a Gothic style in the next and a renaissance style roof to go with it. And so, it's impossible not to be struck by the beauty that surrounds you.

It also, therefore, makes you reflect on how beautiful our diversity is. The inclusion of different groups and their creativity can truly amount to some wonderful things. Unfortunately, however, history is testament to the fact that we are often scared of difference and instead of embracing diversity many people allow themselves to become afraid of it. And so, although there were times of peace and



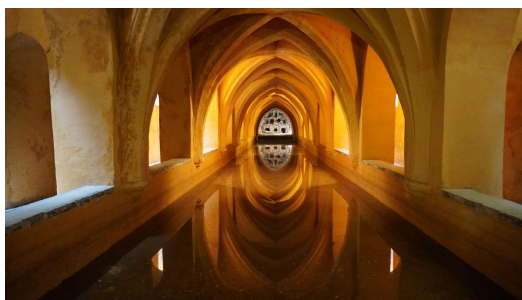
prosperity for the different religious communities in southern Spain, there were also unfortunately times of war and violence. I think as Christians we should be deeply ashamed that the story of those communities in Andalucía ends when the supposed Christian Kings and Queens conquered the region and decided to also expel all the Muslims and Jews. They told families who had been on that land for generations, people whose roots there went back centuries that they were no longer welcome and had to leave. It's heart-breaking and what makes it all the more shameful is that it was apparently done in the name of Jesus!



It is so important that we remember our past no matter how painful it can be so that we can ensure we never make the same mistakes as those who went before us. Walking around Seville and Granada, with all their beauty, there is also a sense of what could have

been. How would the history of Europe had looked if the peaceful coexistence and flourishing of Muslims, Christians and Jews together had continued. What beautiful works of art, what new books of knowledge, what scientific breakthroughs have been missed simply because we allow ourselves to be scared of our neighbour if they happen to be different to us.

Returning from my trip, I am reminded of the importance of our work as the Church to ensure we learn from the mistakes of the past and follow the teaching of Jesus to love our neighbour! We must be people who rejoice in diversity. People who are always welcoming. We need to seek to learn from our brothers and sisters of other faiths and create communities where all are loved and respected and given the opportunity to flourish. And when we do, I'm sure



we will find we create together beautiful things which bring joy to all who experience them.

God bless,

*Josh*



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## Worship for All – December!



It's only just October, but the Worship for All team is already thinking ahead to Christmas! More specifically, we are planning a nativity service on 19th December and would like your help. We would like for groups to do a short segment (whether a song, a sketch, something serious, something not-so-serious, or something else entirely...) relating to one part of the nativity story.

If your Connect Group would like to participate, or if you are not a member of a Connect Group but still wish to take part, please let me know by email ([lwatson96@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:lwatson96@hotmail.co.uk)) by **24th October**. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to email me, or find me at Church on 10th or 17th October.

Thank you!

*Leah Watson*



# PCC Report – September

## Meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> September – by Zoom

*Finances* Peter Dean reported that at the end of August, ie two-thirds of the way through the year, expenditure continued to be lower than budget and income was slightly above budget, with the result that the accounts showed a surplus of income over expenditure. Some Gift Aid remained to be claimed but there were also significant expenditures in train. The finances continued to need close monitoring.

*Buildings* Roger Courtney provided an update on various works including in the bell chamber. The Council considered an estimate for remedial works on the north side ground-level floodlights but decided to defer these for the present and explore the potential for external funding for their replacement. Repairs to the Cloisters Office were authorised.

Other matters considered by the Council included:

*Minutes Secretary* The Council still lacked a Minutes Secretary. This was an urgent need and it was hoped that a member of the congregation would be prepared to offer to undertake it.

*Safeguarding Officer* This important position was now vacant. Jacky Faria assisted by Cath would fulfil the responsibilities for the immediate future but it was essential that a successor to Claire Edwards should come forward.

*AV improvements* An aisle projector needed servicing. This would be an opportunity to discuss with the installers changes to our AV system that would provide better connectivity with the Internet and simplify matters for the technical team.

*Noticeboards* The blue noticeboards outside the church no longer provided the correct information about services. Ideas for their replacement, including installing a digital board to enable more information to be provided, were discussed. These will be explored further.

*Mission support* The Missions Group had considered a request to continue support for the Church Missionary Society after Andrew and Maria Leake left the organisation to work for Compassion International. Their view was that it would be preferable to continue supporting Andrew and Maria with whom St Mary's had a personal link.

*Church opening* With the partial return to working from the church office, the church could be open for more than the previous 'private prayer' periods although full opening had yet to be achieved.

The Vicar encouraged all PCC members to participate in the meeting with Bishop Michael on 25<sup>th</sup> September and noted the successful launch of the new evening service arrangements on 5<sup>th</sup> September, with more members of the congregation attending than had been at the 10.30 service that day. Because of the need to respond to the inflow of families from Afghanistan, he had spent much time since returning from holiday on issues concerning refugees and asylum seekers.

*Roger Courtney*

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*Daniella was baptised, along with her brother Daniel, during the Morning Service on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> September 2021.*

## Daniella's Testimony

When Tony first asked me about my faith journey leading up to getting baptised, I didn't really know what to say, I had a "why", which I guess at first was because it seemed like a logical step after growing up in the church all my life. But I didn't really know why I wanted this. So, not being inclined to lie to a vicar, I told a half-truth which was that after growing up and participating in the church, and taking the time in quarantine to ask about and research my faith I wanted to get baptised as a logical next step that just felt right. That was all true, but it was an incomplete story which I've tried my best to piece together properly for today.

Ezekiel 36:26 has always been my favourite verse. It's a promise from God that I never understood why it had been my favourite, until I began preparing this. It says "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh". I knew the context of how it relates to repentance and God establishing a new covenant with Israel whose hearts had hardened against him, but I never really understood why I felt like it sat right with me, until I took a look at how God has been working in my life over the past year.

Suffice it to say that I had been well and truly heartbroken. 2020 was a rough year, and with the loss of grandparents on either side, frequent panic attacks and free-falling school grades I had no idea who I was. And in contrast, this was a year when everyone I knew seemed to be finding themselves, having used quarantine and the time away to do that, and I had always prided myself on my strong sense of identity and sense of mission, but I was lost, could barely tell up from down and found myself on my 18th birthday, turning 16 whilst stuck in an 18 year olds body.

So I started asking myself questions I'd never really asked before, like "why is this happening to me, why am I so scared all the time" and of course

growing up in church I knew the logical answer, to remind myself of the story of Job and that horrible things can happen to anybody. And the story of Daniel in the Lion's den and his unshakeable fearlessness. But I couldn't shake the fact that they knew who they were and I didn't, I didn't really know anything.

Now, I don't remember the day, or time, or even what I was doing when this happened but in all this messy worry, the smallest thought popped into my head, "They knew God. Their identity was in Him." And it might seem like a weird thing to forget considering the fact that their stories are found in the bible as examples of great men and women of faith, but I'd forgotten that and remembering or more accurately, being reminded, was like being handed a life vest in a storm.

And so, putting the vest on, I floated, holding on to the fact that even when I don't know anything at all I know God and putting my faith in the fact that that is enough, that He is enough to keep me afloat. And as I kept floating, I never realised when I finally washed ashore. There were a couple stormy nights, yes but for the most part, I was given peace, and made still because a still small voice gave me a life vest, kept me afloat and started to build me a new heart, and put a new spirit within me removing a broken heart of stone and giving me a heart of flesh.

So today I'm glad this wonderful church family of ours is here to celebrate with my brother and I as we get baptised, and I'm grateful to even be here because God truly has placed me on solid ground and for that I thank God.

## Daniel's Testimony

So where did my Christian journey start? Well, one could say from when I was born. I've been raised in a kind, loving Christian household from birth, learning more about him day by day, so I have witnessed Baptisms on more than one occasion. But going into this, I simply knew that having one of my own would be a completely different experience and this made me think about what Baptism means to me and why I wanted to get baptised myself.

From my upbringing, I've heard stories all my life of what God has done in the lives of those older than me, those with more experience with the world, who've seen and done far more than I have. As a result, I initially began to think that all I could see and learn about God was from others and I yearned desperately for a personal, unforgettable experience with Him. This made me remember Jesus' words in Matthew 7:7 in which he proclaims "Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you." However, I still thought something was missing, something I could say was part of my identity in Christ.

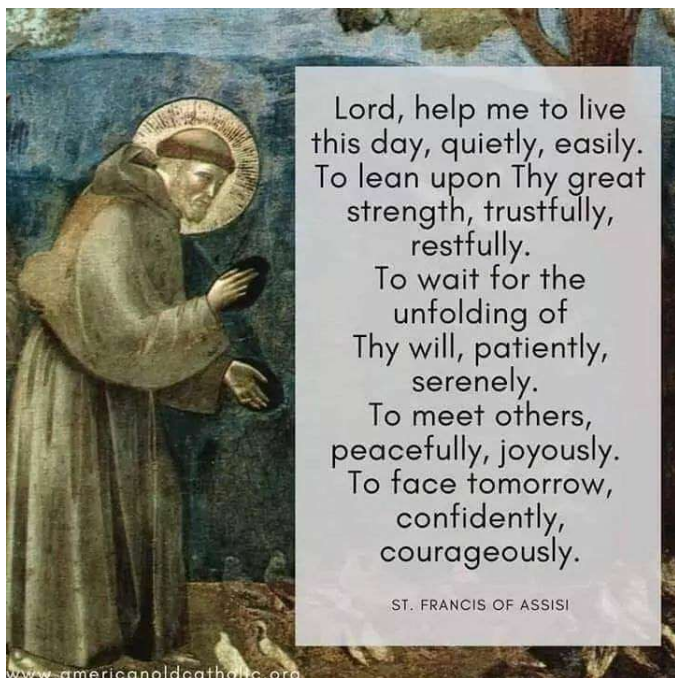
Now you must be wondering why this bothered me so much, as I'm still a child and have years to figure this all out, but the reason this posed such an issue for me was because asking questions is in my nature, I find pleasure and take immense pride in finding out as much as I can about pretty much everything, so when I couldn't figure out what I initially believed was "missing", it filled me with anxiety. So, what was that element I thought had eluded me for the entirety of my life as a Christian?

It was Faith - the proof of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. The issue was I'd forgotten the countless times God had saved me, from things I didn't even know could harm me. Like when I heard a voice telling me to leave my room and go to my parents' moments before a heavy wooden bunk-bed would've fallen on the spot upon which six year old me sat. And this was not because I deserved it, far from it, but simply because God cared for me. This made me realise a great many things that I hadn't noticed before. To begin with, when Jesus uses the words "seek, and ye shall find", he's talking about a **personal commitment** to Him, one which lets you see the world in a new light, at a perspective which allowed me to see the truth that the answers I was searching for were right in front of me from the very beginning: that God's love was all around me, from the intelligence with which the earth itself was created, to the kindness we see in each other on a day to day basis.

As a result, the reason I want to be baptised is as I want to be a part of that love and help others realise it's been right there for them too, even if they

couldn't see it. I want to walk around knowing that of a truth I've affirmed my own faith in Christ. I want to wear my faith on my sleeve and have the boldness to proclaim to others that we are all children of God. I want to walk in God's embrace knowing and accepting that I've found my identity in Christ. I've since come to realise that one's journey as a Christian often doesn't simply just start or begin but is an ever-evolving part of your life, as His thoughts are not our thoughts and nor are His ways our ways. So, no matter how hard we try, we cannot condense God's immense power into words or fully understand His divine ways, but the more we encounter new people and see his works in their lives, the more we grow faith and learn new things about him and further our path on our own journeys. And I believe getting Baptised is an integral part of that journey.

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St Francis of Assisi is remembered by the Anglican Church on 4<sup>th</sup> October

# Current Affairs **Connect Group**

## Levelling up education

*In September, the Current Affairs Group discussed the second of a short series on levelling up in preparation for meeting with Dean Russell MP in December:*  
***Levelling Up - What does it mean for education policy?*** In the last decade, spending per pupil in England has seen the largest cut in 40 years while the pandemic has highlighted the gap between poorer and better off pupils. What are the problems experienced by poorer pupils and what would a Christian approach to education policy look like? We were assisted by Juliet Scourfield and Eileen Roby who are primary school teachers.

### *Background*

A disadvantaged child is three times more likely to be excluded from school and 18 months behind when they take their GCSEs.

17.3% of pupils in the UK are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM). 33% of these achieve five or more A\* to C grades at GCSEs compared with 61% of those better off pupils who do not need FSM.

One in eight schools across the country do not have a library. Schools with a large number of pupils eligible for FSM, where libraries would be most beneficial, are twice as likely to be without a library.

The UK is the world's fifth economy yet ranks 23rd in educational inequality in primary schools and 16th in secondary schools, behind less affluent countries such as Romania and Poland.

During the pandemic, teachers from deprived schools reported that more than a third of pupils would not have electronic access to schoolwork compared to 2% at more affluent state schools.

Only 6% of young people are educated privately in the UK but they make up 55% of students at Russell Group universities, whose earnings are 40% more than those from other universities. Disadvantaged students, who are

less likely to attend Russell Group universities, therefore have fewer opportunities to escape poverty.

In a 2017 speech, the former Conservative Education Minister, Justine Greening, explained that 40% of the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers is already there by the age of 5. And that greater levels of social mobility could boost the UK economy by £140 billion a year.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) reports that state school spending per pupil in England has seen the largest cut – 9% in real terms – in over 40 years.

The National Audit Office (NAO) found that although overall funding for schools in England rose from £36.2 billion in 2014-15 to £43.4 billion in 2020-21, the rising number of pupils means real-terms funding per pupil increased by only 0.4 per cent. Moreover, the funding formula has led to the average amount spent on each pupil in the most deprived fifth of schools falling in real terms by 1.2 per cent.

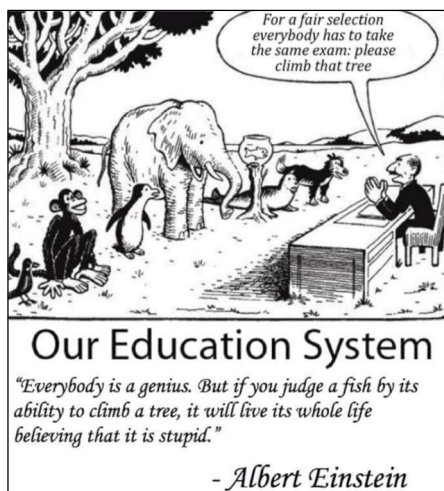
#### *What the teachers told us*

The educational system in England has moved over the last 20 years from a broad based to an academic approach tested by exams at several stages. This has increased the gap between pupils from different backgrounds. It is a “one size fits all” system which values only academic attainment rather than e.g. practical or spatial intelligence. This system does not allow for children whose intelligence matures more slowly than others.

Children from poorer backgrounds arrive in the reception class already behind and this gap increases as the child moves up the school. Such children come with a restricted vocabulary because their parents speak to them less than more affluent parents and have a restricted vocabulary themselves. It’s therefore difficult for such children to understand what the teacher is saying, making behavioural problems and disruptions to the class more likely. The home conditions of such children are frequently cramped and noisy and less than ideal e.g. for concentrating on homework. All of this requires more adult support in the class to remedy but frequently schools in disadvantaged areas can’t afford this.



Indeed, many working-class parents are unable to work the system to obtain access to the additional services their children need. Such parents also find it difficult to fund school trips or to donate at school funding days in the way that parents from more affluent areas can. As a result, schools in disadvantaged areas tend to be considerably less well funded.



### *What the Bible says*

The Bible frequently speaks about the need for education (e.g. Proverbs 1.7, 4.13, 22.6, 29.15). There are different kinds of education and intelligence, but all are God given. As well as the academic skills of Moses (Acts 7.22), Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego (Daniel 1:17) and Paul of Tarsus (Acts 22.3), including those who could teach (Exodus 35:34), there were also the more practical skills: engravers, designers, embroiderers and weavers (Exodus 35:35), stonecutters, masons and carpenters (1 Chronicles 22:15).

On the basis of loving our neighbour as ourselves (Lev 19.18, Mark 12.31) the Bible contains many exhortations to equity and justice (e.g. Leviticus 19:15).

### *Reflections*

We agreed that the NAO and IFS reports demonstrated the economic disparity between disadvantaged and affluent areas and the need to level up by ensuring proper funding and a fairer distribution of resources.

We also agreed that there were different kinds of intelligence. At present there was an overemphasis on the academic at the expense of other types of intelligence e.g. skill based. Children were not empty vessels to be filled with a certain type of knowledge but, as scripture shows, individual persons with a diversity of God given gifts, irrespective of class.

The education system had its limits and could not be individually tailored to a pupil's needs. However, it should be sufficiently flexible to cater for less academic pupils. We recalled the success of the secondary technical colleges up to the early 1980s which gave training and qualifications in practical subjects.

We considered that the object of education should be to allow a child to achieve its full potential. There was nothing wrong as such with children having different aspirations according to their family background and social class, as long as they were encouraged to have such aspirations and to want to learn. Consequently, levelling up should be more about the distribution of resources and less about changing aspiration or increasing the proportion of working-class people in professional jobs.

That said, it seems that over a relatively short period good education can improve social mobility. Several of us explained how in just two or three generations, our own families had risen to the professions from humble origins.

We agreed that it was tragic so many pupils arrived at school barely able to speak. The need for children to develop good vocabulary, to be numerate and able to read was essential in society. We observed, for example, that 75% of prison inmates were functionally or wholly illiterate. We struggled with how parents, who themselves have low levels of vocabulary, literacy and probably self-esteem, could be encouraged to help their children develop literacy. One possible way could be the recommendation of the Parliamentary Education Committee that particular groups, such as white working-class children and their families, need to be supported "from cradle to career". Clearly that would entail significant economic resource.

Finally, we were concerned about the politics of education. Up until the early 1980s, education policy was agreed between the parties. In contrast,

education today is a political football. Moreover, ministers' terms in office are now much shorter at 18-24 months. Because each education minister wants to make their mark, they make expensive, frequent changes causing upheavals to teachers and pupils that are frequently amended or changed by the next minister. Some of us felt education should be less political and should be left more to independent educational experts, although we recognised the need to ensure ministerial accountability due to the large sums of taxpayer money involved.

*The Current Affairs Group next meets at 8pm on 8th October in the Church Centre. Alison Thomas from the Watford Women's Refuge will be speaking and answering questions about **Domestic Violence**. All welcome.*

*The Current Affairs Group*

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## Who's Who at St Mary's

**Vicar** The Revd Tony Rindl | 01923 225189 / 07792 505480  
[tony.rindl@gmail.com](mailto:tony.rindl@gmail.com)

**Curate** The Revd Joshua Brocklesby | 07764 738596  
[jbrocklesby.stmaryswatford@gmail.com](mailto:jbrocklesby.stmaryswatford@gmail.com)

**Churchwardens** Alison Saunders | 01923 244390  
Peter Dean | 07876 154387

**Children & Families Worker** Cath Da Costa | 07961 564385  
[familyworker.stmaryswatford@gmail.com](mailto:familyworker.stmaryswatford@gmail.com)

**Facilities Manager** [stmarysfacilitiesmanager@gmail.com](mailto:stmarysfacilitiesmanager@gmail.com)

**Church Office** [office@stmaryswatford.org](mailto:office@stmaryswatford.org)  
St Mary's Church, Church Street, Watford WD18 0EG

[www.stmaryswatford.org](http://www.stmaryswatford.org)

## Services

The Church is open  
on Wednesdays and Saturdays each week  
between 12.00noon and 2.00pm  
for Private Prayer  
*(this may change soon – please keep an eye out on the website  
and Facebook page for details of changes)*

## Sunday

9.00am Holy Communion (said) in church  
on 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday only each month;  
10.30 am Morning Service in church and via Zoom  
every Sunday;  
5.30 pm Encounter in church and via Facebook Live  
on 1st Sunday of month only  
*(preceded at 5.00pm with refreshments)*

## Wednesday

12.30 pm Holy Communion in church

## Monday to Friday

Morning Prayer via Zoom at 9.30am  
*(for Zoom link please contact Church Office)*

Please keep up to date with what is on offer  
via our Facebook page  
or the website [www.stmaryswatford.org](http://www.stmaryswatford.org)