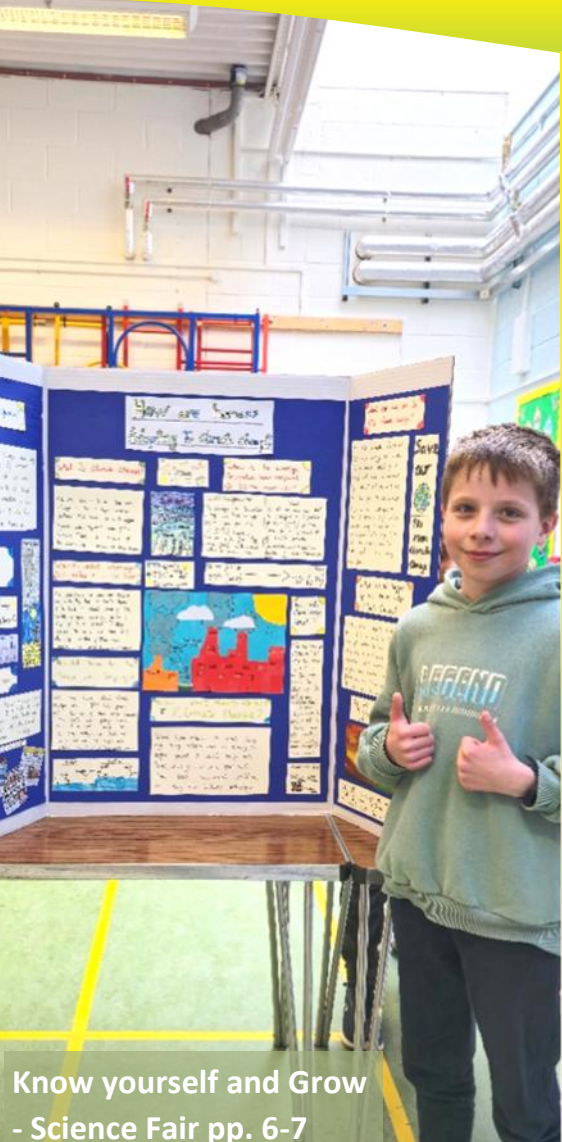


newwt

schools café faith



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Caring for our *Minds*

EASTER 2025

St John & St Stephen's Newtown Community Magazine



Caring for our MINDS

Welcome to NEWT 47



'... Reclothe us in our rightful mind'

That is a beautiful line from an old Victorian hymn, which now seems as though it was ahead of its time with its phrase 'our rightful mind'. Today we know a lot more about mental health and the ways in which it can deteriorate. And we also know that mental health issues are common - in the UK, approximately one in four of us experiences a mental health issue in any given year, and in any given week, one in six report experiencing a common mental health issue like depression or anxiety.

That's a lot of people and a lot of suffering. But in recent times, our understanding has grown. We know that someone can appear quite 'normal' and yet be suffering silently. We know that talking to a trusted friend or professional can greatly help. And we also know that there's something about a screen-based society that has particularly negatively affected the youngest generation.

As we mark the 5th anniversary of the Covid-19 pandemic and recall those added mental and emotional strains, the illness, the schools and places of worship closed, the bereavement and fear, it's understandable that some mental health issues that first began back in spring 2020 are continuing even now.

The cost of living exacerbates the mental health load, and when coupled with physical health issues, unemployment, housing stress, relationship breakdown or bereavement, it's no wonder that around 17% of the population in the UK is on

some sort of anti-depressant medication.

Yet there are things we can do to care for our own mental health - whether or not we have sought medical or therapeutic intervention - and it's good to know that we are not helpless.

We can get outside, breathe the air, walk, interact with nature, face and not repress troubling issues, stroke a pet, paint, phone a friend, listen to music, volunteer, cook, re-frame the way we see a difficult circumstance. And we can join things.

Joining things has been in decline for many years, but when they work well, community groups are a great way to boost mental health.

At St John and St Stephen's our Community Café is open term-time Monday -Thursday mornings, from 8.45am, and provides a place for people needing a moment of quiet to get a free coffee or tea and be in company. If you've never dropped in, come and see us opposite Victoria Way (off Orts Road).

Or why not spend a quiet moment just listening to that hymn - search for it on *YouTube*. When we take time to care for the whole person, mind, body and spirit, we will feel the ultimate benefit.

Claire



Copy date for NEWT's Summer edition will be 20th June 2025

Please send contributions to the Parish Office office@stjohnandststephen.org.uk

or directly to the editor at chris@meunier.org.uk

FASTING

Its mental and spiritual benefits



Fasting is not unique to Islam. It's a spiritual practice that's long been used in Judaism, in Christianity and in fact in most other religions.

This year, the Islamic month of Ramadan and the Christian season of Lent started very close together. So NEWT visited the Aisha mosque and asked Imaam Yahia to help us better understand the mental and spiritual benefits of fasting.

What's your purpose in fasting?

There are several important things we can gain from fasting. Firstly, it helps me become much more conscious of God and his presence looking over me. When I commit to fasting, I'm doing it for my Lord, and my sense of hunger and thirst reminds me constantly that my Lord sees me. He knows what I am doing, and that makes me want to please him by acting kindly and honestly.

So, we don't just fast from food and drink, we also turn away from bad behaviours too, like misuse of the tongue – backbiting, slander, swearing ...

The mosque seems very welcoming and full of activity today ...

Yes, during the fasting month of Ramadan people spend a lot more time in the mosque, praying and learning. Fasting itself and the consciousness it brings is a kind of worship that lasts all day long, not just at prayer times.

A second outcome of fasting is a greater awareness of and gratitude for the gifts of clean water and food. And that leads us to care for all those who don't have ready access to those necessities of life.

And that links with a third mental and spiritual outcome – a softening of the heart. We find ourselves drawn towards generosity and concern for others. It gives us a stronger connection, not just with other Muslims, but with all humans.

Isn't fasting quite a hard struggle? How do you encourage people to look after themselves?

Yes, it is a struggle. It's like working out in a gym to build muscle. You know what the gym coaches say, 'No pain, no gain'. But we do take care.

Anyone who's travelling or pregnant or ill is exempt – they shouldn't fast. And the same goes for young children. As children grow up, we encourage them to gently try out a fast, perhaps just at the weekend.

Our bodies learn how to cope with a fast. When you start it's hard, perhaps a bit like a first childbirth, and when you repeat it your body has adapted making it work better.

Of course, fasting also has some health benefits – giving our system a detox, allowing time for cell repair and improving blood flow. That's on top of the sense of constant worship and awareness of God. So quite a few people practise regular fasting as a private discipline throughout the year. Prophet Mohammed advised fasting on Mondays and Thursdays, so quite a few people aim to do that.

Thank you for those insights, Imaam Yahia. God bless you.

BOOKS *art work* **AWE** **FOR LIFE** *fresh air and* **MOVEMENT**

at New Town Primary School

World Book Day brought all sorts of fun to school, and this year we decided to focus on those who bring wonderful texts to life via illustration. The children focused on a story, and studied the style of illustration before producing some amazing art work which has then been displayed for parents to come and see in an Art Exhibition after school.

Reading and enjoying wonderful books underpins everything we do at New Town and gives a fantastic way to switch off from our worries, thoughts and screens for a little while and look after our mental health.

We've also been enjoying seeing chicks hatch and grow as they visited us over the past few weeks. This inspired awe and wonder in our children, and was a great way not only to study lifecycles and living things, but also take a few precious minutes to hold the fluffy creatures and give them a warm hand to briefly fall asleep on.





New Town Primary School
Respect For All



Our children have also been raising money whilst taking part in a Mini Marathon this term. They collected sponsorship from friends and family, and came in ready to run around the school on a set course, racking up over 800 miles as a whole school!

Not only was this fantastic to raise money to help fund more improvements to our outside grounds and play areas, but was a great way to help us enjoy some fresh air and release some endorphins to make our minds feel good!



Reading RESILIENCE RUCKSACK Project

Recognising that early adolescence (10-14 years) is a high risk time for first developing mental health problems like depression or anxiety, our local NHS partnered with researchers at Reading University.

The Rucksack, containing resources children could choose to use, was produced after reviewing all the latest national research. It was designed for use with children in years 6 and 7 - i.e. spanning the exciting but challenging transition from primary to secondary school.

It's been piloted in a number of schools in Reading, Wokingham, and West Berkshire with good success and it's now in its evaluation stage.

Aware of a potential risk - that well-meaning school interventions to raise awareness of mental health could potentially backfire by increasing anxiety for some - the designers have focussed on emphasising choice and agency for children. The rucksack resources focus on four key areas of personal development, and children choose those they would like

to try out and use. There's a great reading booklist for kids too.



You can find out much more in the project flipbook, published on the University's research website: just search online for 'resilience rucksack project'.



KNOW *yourself* & GROW



at St John's CE School

This year's *Children's Mental Health Week* was focused around the idea of 'Know Yourself, Grow Yourself', where children reflected and completed work on acknowledging how we manage our day to day lives and emotions, and how we can grow ourselves into stronger, more resilient members of society.

The children also worked on ways that they can be *Mental Health Heroes* for each other and learned ways to check in with their friends, support them when they need it and how to take care of their well-being. The children then all collaborated with each other in each class to create an optimistic rainbow of flowers that were themed on having a 'Growth Mindset' and not giving up.

We have also held our annual Science Fair this term which saw our highest number of entries - ever! With over 50 projects submitted from groups of children, the research, knowledge and scientific thinking that was demonstrated was truly remarkable! The future of Planet Earth is hopefully safe in the hands of these budding scientists!

(photos front cover and right) →



St John's children have also been expanding their minds recently as we have been celebrating *British Science Week*! Our week was jam-packed, filled with scientific discovery that got each of their minds to experience awe and wonder about the theme of 'Adapt & Change'.

One of the exciting activities the children took part in was to team up with an older pupil to design the camouflage of a chameleon's skin and how they adapt and change their skin to match their environment. The children had so much fun hiding them around their classrooms and trying to find them all in one great big game of hide-and-seek!





HOPE is...

An exhibition of arts and crafts in St John's Community Cafe

Creative contributions are invited for our "Hope is..." exhibition, which will be on display in the café from 6th April to 11th May.

What gives you hope? Is it something as simple as hanging out the washing on a cold Spring day, or seeing the first splashes of colour as bulbs begin to bloom? Is hope something that comes to us unlooked for, or is it something deliberate – a choice, or a habit we can choose to develop? It may involve creating something, whether it's sewing or sketching or writing a poem.

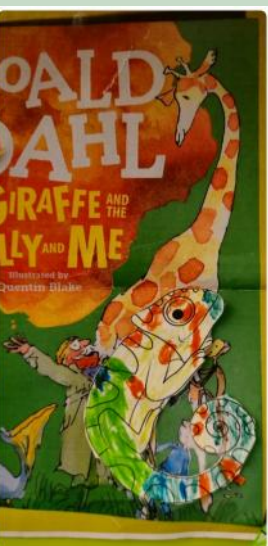
In Michelle Obama's recent book, *The Light We Carry*, she writes about how, through being creative with our hands (in her case it was knitting), we can ground ourselves and give ourselves space to reflect. This doesn't necessarily depend on the end result. As *The Guardian* advice columnist Eleanor Gordon-Smith writes, "You may find that simply doing without an expectation of success helps fuel the engine of hope."

Our Making Mondays in the café this term have also focussed on the theme of hope. We're using this time as a creative space where we can work on our art together. It's also a space where we can try something new, whether we're confident artists or not. Sometimes it's good to simply explore creating and see what happens!

Please email: office@stjohnandststephen.org.uk to register for the exhibition, or to find out more. Paintings, drawings, poetry, photography, digital art and craft are all welcome, as long as they can be framed for display on our walls. Please get in touch if you're not sure.



Most excitingly, our incredible Year 6 children went on a trip to Reading Railway Station to learn about rail safety, how to navigate a busy 16 platform station, purchase train tickets and also travel on the train to Wokingham and back. What took us by surprise, was being approached whilst at the station by the Secretary of State for Transport, Heidi Alexander, who commented on how intelligent, well-behaved and hard-working our children were on their tasks and even requested a photo with them as the highlight of her week! We are so proud of our children and what an amazing way to be recognised for their hard work and exemplary behaviour!



What's normal?

None of us is actually "normal" - we all have our unique characteristics, quirks and concerns! Each of us is "valuable" both in God's eyes and as a human being, and needs to be seen as a "whole person."

Most of us suffer difficulties with mental health at some point in our lives.



Cathy Rowan -
psychotherapist and
retired nurse/midwife

Any of us can experience low moods, grief and anxiety at times, as well as finding it difficult to cope with life.

Depression is a very common human reaction to bereavement, relationship breakdown or trauma.

Looking after ourselves

Whilst focusing on our "mind", it is important to look after our physical health as well.

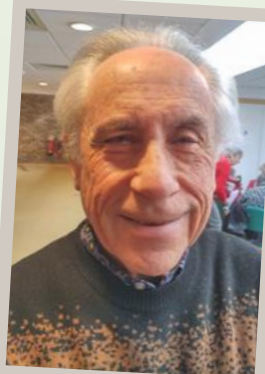
A depressed mood can be slow to lift and it can be helpful to share with someone we trust and/or to inform our GP.

Some things which support our mental wellbeing may include, some lifestyle issues including exercise that you enjoy, diet and sleep.

Some find a mindfulness practice helpful (which involves paying attention to the present moment) or doing something creative. Practising gratitude, walking in nature and singing can also be therapeutic.

Regular connections and meaningful relationships with others are key. Talking and listening without needing to fix are a real gift. Kindness can make a huge difference - kindness to ourselves and towards others.

It is important to notice how we are feeling, and, in some situations, we might need to talk to someone outside our circle. Perhaps ask someone to make suggestions about where to look for further help.



Charles Kenderdine -
retired mental health
social worker

in *our* e

Mental health tips from retired health professionals

Finding help

If the belief that life is no longer worth living persists, then **phone the Samaritans on 116 123** for an immediate listening ear.

If in an abusive relationship, then contact either Alana House on 0118 9217640 or BWA Against Domestic Abuse on 0808 801 0882

For counselling and support services in our locality, please **look on page 14** in this magazine.

Helping others

As a friend, being prepared to listen and imagine ourselves in the other person's situation, can be invaluable.

Being alert to when someone may be feeling lonely or excluded, can nudge us into gently coming alongside that person.

"Helpful" means making ourselves available for someone, avoiding saying "don't worry" (they will anyway!) and not trying to "fix things" for them (we can't!)

Listening, caring, just getting alongside someone is love in action.

Dementia

Understanding - Prevention - Caring

Dementia is caused by the loss of or damage to nerve cells and their connections in the brain. And because different parts of the brain may be affected, and there are different causes for dementia, every sufferer is different.

My mother and father-in-law both died of dementia. It is a horrible disease as it takes away the person you know.

There are things we can do to decrease the risk of getting it – not smoking, exercising regularly, but the commonest cause is still 'getting older' and there is nothing any of us can do about this!

Research suggests other risk factors may be important including:

- ♦ Hearing loss (get your hearing tested and some free NHS hearing aids if you need them)
- ♦ Untreated depression (see your GP)
- ♦ Loneliness (make that call you've been meaning to, join a club ... or come along to St John's café or church!)
- ♦ Sitting for most of the day (get walking!)

The research concluded that by modifying these risk factors, around 4 in 10 cases of dementia could be prevented.

experience

... and personal strategies from some ordinary folk

Food: I make protein a priority in the morning and try to eat enough of it. I limit higher sugar foods for after exercise so that I don't get dips in mood.

To meditate I dance and/or play guitar. If I am feeling emotional, I find a speech from a play and perform it. I try to get outside. I avoid mirrors and limit time on social media. I listen to comedy panel gameshows on the radio, so I can walk or do housework at the same time.

I try to delegate tasks to avoid my getting overwhelmed, to be compassionate to myself and to write down what I do each day.



Natalie

To look after my brain I do puzzles. I read news articles and commentary that make me think.

I find the miracle of modern medical science (i.e. *anti-depressants*) has been a great help for a long time.

More recently, silent contemplative prayer and spiritual direction have had a significant impact for me.



Andrew

When I've had an MRI scan which I hate, enclosed in a tunnel, I close my eyes and sing in my head, "Calm me Lord as you calmed the storm", over and over again. It really helps, but I know that's a one off.

In general terms, I treasure our Wednesday walks, getting out in the country and fresh air, thanking God for it. Also for my mental health, I find my art and music take me away from worries.



Lorna

And how can you best care for someone who has dementia?

Maybe the most important things are patience and kindness – and looking after yourself.

Two things are 100% sure – it is not their fault, and you will need God's help and other people's!



Rosie Croft - retired GP



Sue

Like so many others, I find being in natural green spaces really helps calm my mind and raise my mood. Here in Newtown we are lucky to be close to the river and to the Old Cemetery.

The Friends of Reading Old Cemetery meet from 2-4 on the first Sunday of every month to help maintain this wildlife haven, and they are a lovely friendly group.

And there are some beautiful places just a bus ride away – the 4, 13 and 19a all stop near Dinton Pastures; or there's the Loddon Nature Reserve near Twyford Station (Bus 850).

Window-boxes or a pot on a balcony can attract butterflies if planted with flowers such as nasturtiums, lavender, heather, grape hyacinths ...



Joanna

I listen to *Taizé* chants. I've made a playlist of them on my phone. On the night before my heart operation it helped me focus on God rather than what was going to happen to me the next day.



Carol

The main thing I do for my mental health is taking medication. However, I've also found that minimising social media helps (I deleted Facebook over 6 years ago).

Café has always been a huge positive influence for me. I once described it as being like a lifeboat when life's sea is stormy. Spending time with others can be so beneficial. Plus crafting, reading and, when the weather is good, walking.



Charlotte

Know your Newts

meeting the people in our community

ABI RYAN

From the time of her father's death, when she was only five, Abi's life has been a real roller-coaster ride, including separation from her family, a disastrous transition between schools, homelessness, the collapse of her marriage, the pandemic and a nervous breakdown. However, her inspiring story is also one of resourcefulness, the support of true friends and medical professionals, work that she loves and a deep faith in the love of God. These have helped to set her free from the unhappiness and guilt of the past and to start to live in a new place of peace and hope.

You were a little 5 year old girl....

We were living in a small village on the island of Anglesey when my father died of a brain tumour. I felt a failure because the family was falling apart. Everyone was sad and angry with grief and I thought it must be my fault. My father was a merchant seaman so a charity, *St George's Fund For Sailors*, paid for my two older brothers to board at Bearwood College school in Wokingham, and at the age of 9, I was sent to a Methodist boarding school for girls in Colwyn Bay. A year later my mother moved to Reading to accept shift work as a hostel warden. When I got the train to Reading in school holidays, they were the only times we'd be together.

How was school?

I'm very grateful for my boarding school; I loved the routine and the girls but I missed my family, even though home was unhappy. I wasn't academic or sporty but I was good at acting. I had big parts in productions and got medals and trophies for the school in LAMDA exams so that made me happy but then everything changed. My best friend left after GCSEs and my mother got a 9 to 5 job so she couldn't justify keeping my free place so I came to live in Reading and joined Kendrick Girls. It was too different.



- survivor



■ Prince Philip meets parents and pupils

Everything had been so controlled at boarding school and I had gained no independent learning skills. I now had a lot of free time after school and at weekends. I worked in pubs and cafes and partied hard at raves at the weekend, often getting home at 6 in the morning. Mum had few parenting skills or friends and her family was in Australia. I kept school, social life and home separate.

At boarding school - a good memory.

I started dropping subjects, scraped two A levels and then Mum lost her home.

I was 18 and we were homeless. I then took three jobs and lived with friends in shared houses. I developed chronic pain in my neck and shoulders and my mental health was declining rapidly. I was on an enormous dose of amitriptyline: 200mg! And then, at the age of 21, I woke up on a psychiatric ward in London.



With schoolfriends

How did you survive?

I decided to stop raving. I split up with my boyfriend and moved out of the shared house. I took lodgings with a sensible, mature lady and got myself a job as a peripatetic teaching assistant. I started working with children who were autistic or had ADHD and I joined Greyfriars church.

You became a Christian?

Not then, but earlier. At boarding school, I loved the singing and the worship. I loved the teaching and the sermons and the idea that God loves me. At 15, I was confirmed by Dr Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Wales. Years later, on that psychiatric ward in London, I received a card from Father Henry, the vicar at All Saints Church in Reading. I thought I had ruined my life but he was telling me that I was being prayed for.

So you decided to take action ...

After assisting with the special needs children I knew what I wanted to do. I spent three years studying for a degree in Primary Education, which qualified me to teach, and I met my future husband, Chris, who was so supportive. I then had posts in three Reading primary schools. We married in 2008 and at the end of the year Daniel was born with Elsie following five years later. I then took a job at Cranbury College, a Pupil Referral Unit at an Academy for young people from 5 to 11 years who've been excluded from school. Some had already been diagnosed with e.g. autism or ADHD. Others were awaiting diagnosis. I actually really enjoyed teaching children who could be on top of a cupboard at 9am throwing things at you and then, later, you would be sitting reading with them!

But it was very tiring hard work, so I took up a post in a

primary school as a part time SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) whilst training in Special Needs at the university one day a week. I then worked full time at a Special School. Meanwhile my life at home was deteriorating and in the end Chris and I went our separate ways.

I then became a supply teacher until I got a part time job supporting special needs children in online English lessons at Bulmershe School during the Covid pandemic. It was awful.

Most of the time I'd be waiting at the computer and the children just wouldn't appear.

My children and I moved houses a couple of times and in 2021 I had a nervous breakdown. It was all too much. I couldn't stop crying and I gave up the job. I would only leave the house to go to Aldi or for my Cognitive Behaviour appointments for my anxiety and depression. I found it hard to see people who cared for me. I didn't want them to know what had happened. I was just trying to hold it together.

SERENITY PRAYER

God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time,
enjoying one moment at a time;
accepting hardship as a pathway to peace;
taking, as Jesus did,
this sinful world as it is,
not as I would have it;
trusting that You will make all things right
if I surrender to Your will;
so that I may be reasonably happy in this
life
and supremely happy with You forever in
the next.
Amen.

Did anything help?

Yes. Four things. Firstly, there was the counselling I was given by the NHS.

Secondly, there was the support of a 12-step *Co-dependency Anonymous* fellowship I had joined when my marriage was failing. Talking things through, instead of holding everything inside, helped me think clearly and set myself objectives.

Thirdly I had my faith which reminded me of the importance of trusting God. My faith, and e.g. the *Serenity Prayer*, enabled me to

wait through difficult times in my life and accept the changes that have happened. The highlights have been the smaller quieter times, those late night tearful prayers that, with time, are answered, and the moments, often years later, when you realise your hopes and prayers have indeed been answered.

"I am living within my values now ... trying to be the best mother I can be ... valuing myself - which I have never experienced before. "

continued/

Know Your Newts

ABI RYAN

Fourthly, the love and support of my family, friends and church. For the last sixteen years I have been a member of *St John & St Stephen's*. I remember walking into the church one day in 2004 and being welcomed by Liz Bailey. I was soon part of a lovely homegroup we called the 'Wednesday Wonders' that met weekly.

Elsie loves some of the young people's sessions like *Godly Play* and *Forest Church* and I get to see my friends.

How are you doing now?

I'm doing very well. In 2022, I got a part-time job as SENCO at a lovely village school

for one and a half days a week. We have been given one of two semis out in the beautiful West Berkshire countryside. We're quite isolated but it's peaceful and we have wonderful views. I had panic attacks last summer, and in September a psychiatrist diagnosed me with complex PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) And I'm on a waiting list for a diagnosis of adult autism, but I feel that I'm getting there.

I am living within my values now. Single parent family values. I am trying to be the best mother I can be. I'm learning the value of my faith and the importance of self care - valuing myself - which I have never experienced before. Now I value myself as a mother too. Although my feelings can still be extremely overwhelming and unmanageable at times, I'm trying to do more things that I know are important to me, rather than being led by my emotions.

So what do you do now to care for your mental health?

Walk in nature. I need lots of time alone but also connections with safe people. I let myself feel my feelings. I sit with them and listen to them, and journalling helps me to process them. I listen to a wide range of music - anything with a strong rhythm. I have learned to crochet and in the summer I like to do a little gardening or go swimming at the lido in Newbury which helps me to be happy in my body.

Thank you so much, Abi, for being willing to share your struggles and some of the ways in which you have learned to care for yourself.

It's an inspiring story!



Using her specialist teaching skill to help out at Forest Church



Forest

Come and join the fun ...

Begun during the pandemic when families could first meet together again outside, Forest Church continues to encourage our young people to meet in the outdoors and spend time with each other and God, exploring the natural world together.

We explore and we play, we create and we learn. Sometimes we sing and we find different ways to pray and listen to what the Bible says.

January: New Year
Looking forward and back



We explored and learned from New Year customs in various calendars and faiths



Giving thanks and sharing future hopes



Jesus doesn't change - his commitment to love and guide us stays the same. And we can always make a new start with him at any time of the year

Church

We meet once a month on a Sunday afternoon in different outdoor venues and in all weathers!

A important part of Forest Church is spending time with one another. Almost every session ends with time to catch up over hot chocolate and toasted marshmallows.

To find out more and perhaps join us,
email: office@stjohnandststephen.org.uk
or phone: 0118 926 3633



Vicki

March: enjoying the spring-like weather in the university's Harris Gardens ...



... and learning about animals and plants that appear in Bible stories.

February: Candlemas - some crazy traditions!

... and remembering when Jesus was presented as a baby in the Temple .



We ended with a song giving thanks to our great God for so many amazing things in the world.



Making our own candles



... regularly ending up with plenty of fun, fire and fellowship!





Find out more at:
www.together-uk.org

Together for Mental Wellbeing was formed in 1879 making it the UK's oldest community mental health charity in England. Here in Reading, Together offers a range of services to our area, supporting people to lead independent, fulfilling lives as part of their communities.

Together-Reading Services are easily accessible and are based locally at 1A Rupert Square, RG1 3HE. Their services include: West Berkshire Breathing Space, Managing Emotions Programme, Reading Community Outreach Service (RCOS), Creative Wellbeing at Prospect Park Hospital and Reading Wellbeing Platform: Support Hub.

Breathing Space is a safe and supportive crisis service. Their telephone lines are open Monday -Thursday from 5 to 11pm with appointments available for Service Users who believe they may benefit from 6 sessions of regular support. To contact Breathing Space call us on 0800 002 9091 or email breathing-space@together-uk.org.

RCOS offers up to 9 weeks of 1-2-1 support for service users within the community as well as a diverse range of group workshops. To refer yourself into RCOS call us on 0203 962 8201 or email readingcos@together-uk.org.

When NEWT visited the Rupert Square base recently, a poetry workshop had just finished and poems and art work were on display.



Artwork.



Opening the new Support Hub on Reading station concourse.

Email: office@hopecounselling.org
Website: www.hopecounselling.org
Phone: 0118 328 3258

Hope
Counselling Service
Registered charity No 1185376

Hope is a counselling service offering help + and support to adults experiencing issues such as anxiety, depression, relationship difficulties, bereavement or other problems.

We offer a safe, confidential environment in which to talk and be heard, a time to reflect and to explore your situation and the changes you would like to make, in a supportive, counselling relationship.

Counselling is available, subject to waiting times, on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

There is no set fee for counselling but, to meet costs and enable us to continue to run the service, we do invite a monetary donation for each session.

Organisational Membership Number A00294

Where are we?
 at Cemetery Junction
 Office and counselling rooms:
 229 Kings Road, Reading RG1 4LS
 Postal address: 233 Kings Road, Reading RG1 4LS

More help:

SAMARITANS
 Call free day or night on
116 123
 A registered charity

dates *for* your diary

Christian aid 80 years

Bix Walk the Country

Saturday 3rd May 2025

Walk 5 or 10 miles in the beautiful Oxfordshire countryside and raise money to transform lives with Christian Aid.



Start between 9.30am and 1pm from Bix Village Hall, Rectory Lane, Bix RG9 6DH - between Henley

Get sponsored for walking for Christian Aid or make a donation

For more information:
contact Rosemary on rosemaryacraft@gmail.com or 01189 260672

Christian Aid is a key member of ACT Alliance, Eng and Wales charity no. 1105851 Scot charity no. SC039150 Company no. 5171525. Christian Aid. © Christian Aid 1/3/2024 - 21:35:17

Christian Aid quiz



on Friday May 9th at
St John & St Stephen's church .
7pm with delicious
deserts in the break.
Tickets £10 or £4 (unwaged).
Bring a team!
Tickets and details
from rosemaryacraft@gmail.com
or ebailey101@btinternet.com



Free Entry – All ages welcome!

Bringing People Together with Food, Music, Poets and Joy!

TUTU'S COMMUNITY FESTIVAL

DON'T MISS OUT!

1-6pm
Sunday 29th June

FEATURING:
Tutu's BBQ Special
Enjoy sizzling flavors
fresh off the grill
Live Music & Performances
Groove to an exciting lineup
of talented local artists

Palmer Park Lodge RG6 1LF

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On Sunday 13th April, Sikhs across Reading and the world will be celebrating Vaisakhi, Navjit Kaur Gill explains its meaning and invites neighbours to enjoy the celebration at the Gurdwara in Cumberland Road.

Vaisakhi – The Birth of the Khalsa

Reading's annual Nagar Kirtan procession planned for early May



This is one of the most important days in the Sikh calendar as on this day in 1699, our 10th Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji formalised the Khalsa.

The Khalsa is the collective body of baptised Sikhs who promote values of courage, equality, selflessness, and devotion to God and serving the community. The Khalsa is ordered to be honest, meditate on God's name, fight injustice and protect the weak and vulnerable. Khalsa members also

follow a strict code of conduct and can be visually identified by their five 'K's. These are Kes (uncut hair), Kangha (a small wooden comb), Kara (an iron bracelet), Kachera (white undergarment for purity), and Kirpan (a small ceremonial dagger).

Guru Gobind Singh Ji also reminded the Khalsa that there is only one Universal

Creator and that all people are therefore equal, regardless of their religion, gender, ethnicity, colour, caste, or other attributes. There is a light that shines within each of us, the same light that is part of the Universal Creator.

On Vaisakhi, Guru Gobind Singh Ji also made significant efforts to end the unjust caste system by instructing his Sikhs to adopt the middle name *Singh* for males and *Kaur* for females. *Singh*, meaning lion, symbolises bravery, strength, and warrior spirit, while *Kaur*, meaning Princess, signifies that women hold power over their own destiny, are free from oppression, and are empowered to shape their own future.

How is Vaisakhi celebrated?

In Reading, we celebrate Vaisakhi with a special annual procession through the

streets called a "Nagar Kirtan." *Nagar* means town, and *Kirtan* refers to singing hymns and reading aloud from the Guru Granth Sahib Ji (the Sikh holy scripture).

Free food is also served to all in a tradition known as *Langar*. This is a wonderful opportunity to connect with others who join the procession from all walks of life.

During the Vaisakhi procession, children and youth also showcase their martial arts skills, adding even more vibrancy to the event. Yellow and royal blue are the traditional colours of Vaisakhi, symbolising the rebirth of the new spring season, joy, and prosperity to the festive celebrations.



Celebrating *Easter* in Newtown



Remember, wonder and celebrate with us at St John & St Stephen's church.

13th April, Palm Sunday - when Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey as the prophesied Messiah king

10.30 am: Holy Communion followed by a Procession

17th April, Maundy Thursday - when Jesus shared his last supper with his followers before being arrested and put on trial by his religious enemies

7.30 pm: Holy Communion

18th April, Good Friday - when Jesus was executed by hanging on a Roman cross

2pm: Act of Worship outdoors on forecourt, followed by Stations of the Cross inside

20th April, Easter Sunday - when Jesus' tomb was empty and his followers met him alive, risen from the dead!

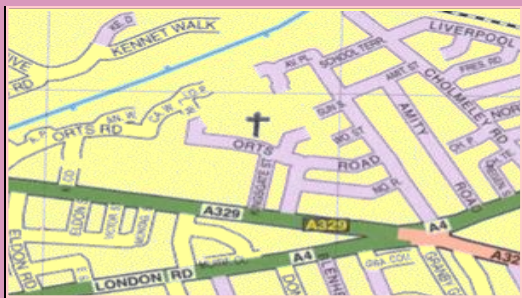
10.30 am: Holy Communion for all the family



Church Contacts



Vicar
**Rev Claire
Alcock**



**Sunday worship 10:30 am
- everyone welcome**



Parish Centre
Administrator
Jo Laynesmith



Churchwardens
**Ian Maynard
& Sue Bruce**



Assoc. Priest
**Christine
Bainbridge**

please phone the Parish Office 0118 926 3633
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