

newt

schools community faith



Spot the duck p.13



Senior Thursdays p.3

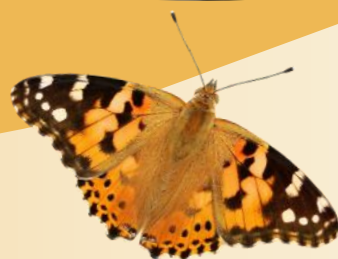


Fishing for friends p15

Being good **friends**

SUMMER 2024

St John & St Stephen's Community Magazine
stjohnandststephen.org.uk



GOOD friends

Welcome to NEWT 44

Valuing Friendship

Friendship is one of life's real joys. We can (I hope) all name a special friend we remember from school, or even nursery school. Maybe you are even in touch today. Friends have something in common; they understand each other and feel like equals. You can share news with your best friend that no one else might know. They stand by you when you're in need.

Someone has said there are friends for a reason, friends for a season and friends for life. As I get older, I am grateful for those friends who have emerged in the friends for life category, and I try and make time to see them – not because I feel I ought to, but because when I do I feel renewed and comforted.

The medical profession increasingly recognises that the number one indicator of a long life is not a strong heart, or plenty of good food or exercise, but the number and quality of our social connections. This is why loneliness is, quite literally, a killer.

Friendship with God is something that Christians value. It sounds like an impossible thought, but Jesus talked to his disciples (followers) as he neared the end of his life and said 'I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you' (from John's gospel).

Jesus also experienced the betrayal of a friend (Judas Iscariot) who betrayed him 'with a kiss'. So we know that friendship was very important to Jesus and that he understood how painful it is when it goes wrong.

A true friendship that is graced with goodness will be open and generous too – not gossipy or entirely exclusive. Friends don't seek to control – they let you flourish and have other friendships too. In a world where people are all too easily set against each other in 'win-lose' scenarios (particularly in areas of global conflict, and often, sadly, in political life) friendship is something to be celebrated and sought.

Some local people have found friendship in the St John and St Stephen's café, which runs a term-time drop-in on weekday mornings, starting from 8.45. There is always free tea, coffee and biscuits, and many people have found it to be a welcoming place of connection. (Its programme of other activities is on the back cover.)

Do drop by if you'd like.

Claire.



Copy date for NEWT's Autumn edition will be 13th September 2024

Please send contributions to the Parish Office office@stjohnandststephen.org.uk or directly to the editor at chris@meunier.org.uk

Image: Jesus and Peter as played in the TV series *THE CHOSEN*, see p.13

Senior Thursdays at Wycliffe



Senior Thursdays is a friendship group for older folk that meets at Wycliffe on Thursdays. This is what our regulars think of the group:



"We all care about each other"

"We are all different but we all fit in"

*"Although we are a church based group,
everyone of all faiths and none are
very welcome"*

*"We are a diverse group from all different
backgrounds but we get on well together"*

*"When you get up in the morning and you feel
a little down, it brightens your day knowing
you have Seniors to come to"*

"Friends are important as well as family"

"You make friends you can trust.

They don't let you down"

*"I don't go to church, but I am always made
very welcome and I have made good friends"*

"I enjoy coming even though it's an effort"

*"I enjoy coming to meet people. It cheers me
up getting out of the house"*

"I like coming here. It's really cheerful.

Otherwise I don't see many people"

*"There is a good atmosphere. People look out
for each other and make friends.*

It's a great meeting place"

If you would like to join us, we would be pleased to see you. We meet from 10 am on Thursdays and the cost is £3, which includes "barista" coffee and an optional hour long stretching and strengthening exercise class. For those who want to stay on, we also offer a two course lunch for £4 at 12.45.

GOOD friends

at New Town Primary School

In the last few weeks of the summer term and before Willow and Walnut class leave New Town, we have asked our Year 6 children to reflect on and describe 'What is Friendship?'. Below are some wonderful responses from our students.

What is Friendship?

Jasmine and Anna - Friendship is a bond between two or more people. Friendship starts when someone does a kind deed to you and they start to talk to you more. Then we may find out that we have a lot in common.



What makes a good friend?

Vivaan - A good friend can last a lifetime, even if we only talk once or twice a year. They are there when you need them.

Ansum and Laksha - A good friend should make someone feel happy and comfortable in hard times. Good friends take care of each other.

How does New Town promote friendship?

Jasmine and Anna - New Town school values help our school community with friendship. The Pastoral Team helps when our friendship needs support. Rainbow lunchtime club helps us with activities to support friendship. New Town sports day promoted friendship because we all supported each other, cheering everyone on and complimenting others on their achievements.

Vivaan - Sport day encouraged sportsmanship and created new bonds between people.

Sammy - Our recent 2-night camping trip to Rushall farm has created memories for life and made our friendship even stronger. I loved the team building games, camp fires and river dipping. The talent show was the best.



Signs of a Healthy, Loving Relationship or Friendship

LOVES ME

LOVES ME NOT

✓ Makes me feel safe

Tries to control me ✗

✓ Makes me feel comfortable

Always blames me ✗

✓ Listens to me

Loses their temper quickly ✗

✓ Values my opinion

Makes me feel afraid or sad ✗

✓ Is truthful with me

Puts me down, or bullies me ✗

✓ Likes that I have other friends

Takes my things or controls my money ✗

✓ Treats me like an equal

Makes all the decisions ✗

✓ Accepts me as I am

Embarrasses me in front of others ✗

You don't have to suffer alone.

If you are worried about anyone's immediate safety call 999

Coercive controlling behaviour is one form of domestic abuse (Domestic Abuse Act 2021)

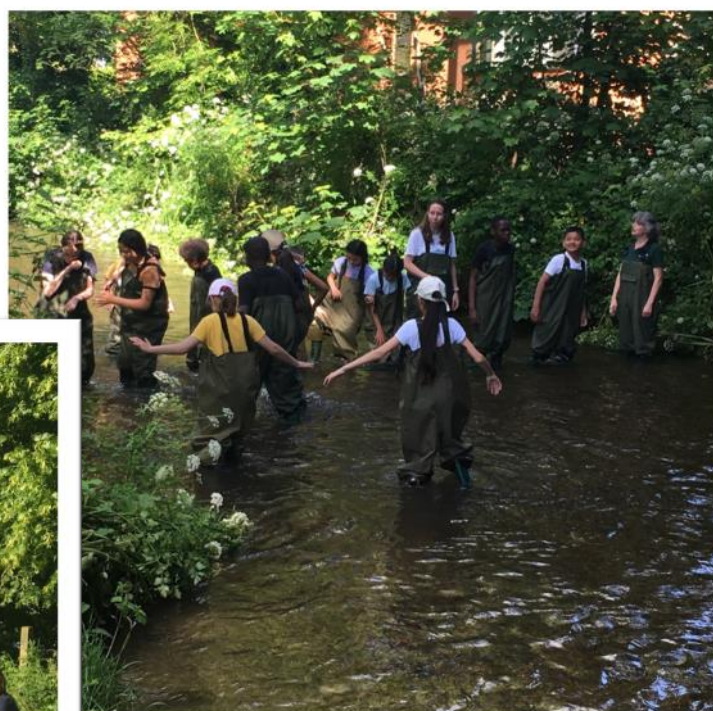
BWA Against Domestic Abuse (formerly Berkshire Women's Aid) is there to support victims of abuse, both women and men

helpdesk@bwaid.org.uk

0808 801 0882

Image credit: Hazelmere parish church

At New Town we continuously support our whole school family to live out our school values of Kindness, Love, Honesty, Trust, Resilience, Determination, Tolerance and Inclusivity, all of which underpin friendship.



We hope that all our year 6 pupils will leave New Town with these values, with amazing memories and with lifelong friends.



GOOD friends



at St John's CE School

Strong friendships can be the cornerstones of our lives that allow us to share in a life of abundant joy and happiness. For many, these friendships begin in school, and continue to flourish as we move through life. For others, the skill of making strong friendships in school allows them to create new friendships as they become adult.

Mrs. Stevens

Someone who has been a pivotal friend to both St John's School and the surrounding community is our very own Mrs Stevens (pictured with some school councillors above). Mrs Stevens has worked at St John's Primary School for over 51 years now and has supported the school unflinching for all these years.

Mrs Stevens has seen the school grow from just 85 pupils in 1973 when based in the centre of Reading, to moving to Orts Road in 1977 and expanding to over 450 pupils today. She has held many roles in this time, from being a teaching assistant, school administrator, lunchtime controller, first aider, after school club leader and a supporter for children with complex needs. What Mrs Stevens has enjoyed most in her 51 years at St John's is seeing the care, commitment, acceptance and encouragement that St John's gives to all of its children, allowing each and every one of them to flourish.

Mrs Stevens has shared some words of advice for those looking to become better friends with others:

"Listen to each other. Take time to understand one another and how others might feel. Try your best not to jump to conclusions". She also says, **"friends may fall out with each other, but the sign of true friendship is being able to make amends, being kind in accepting our own and others failures, forgiving each other and returning to a happy way of life"**.

We give thanks that we all have a friend for life in Mrs Stevens, and for all of the wisdom she shares with our pupils, and the long and committed service she has given to the school.

Year 6 Residential

Our Year 6s have also forged the most wonderful memories with their friends at their Year 6 Residential this term. The Residential allows our children to face new challenges, be courageous, have new experiences and strengthen their friendships with each other. The children loved every moment of it: from building campfires, to rock climbing, to a leap of faith from the high ropes!

We know this experience will be a memorable time in their lives and will have equipped our children to face the new challenges that lie await in secondary school. We wish them all the luck in the world!

70K IN MAY for Christian Aid



Huge congratulations to Silvester, Edward, and Flavio for completing the **Christian Aid 70 k in May** sponsored distance challenge. Each boy committed to doing 70km above his normal routine in May - they each kept a log book of activity and distance and did much more than that in the end - and between them they raised more than £2,000 for Christian Aid's vital development work.

This fantastic effort added to other fundraising activities that older church members took part in during Christian Aid Week, such as a collection at Reading station and a sponsored walk in the countryside near Henley.

3 friends
raised **£2k**



Tom

A good friend is there for you in good times and bad



Reflecting on



A good friend is someone who will tell what you need to hear even if you are not going to like it.

My colleague at work calls herself my awkward friend and I am the same to her. Whenever one of us is down and the other sees it, the other will call it out and challenge lest the behaviour becomes self-destructive, so as to jolt whichever one of us is in the slump out of it and to bring a more objective perspective.

We give permission to each other to do that.

Richard



Dave has been a great friend for 48 years. He and his lovely wife Kath looked after me when I was having a hard time early in my career. When I was feeling bad about myself, he kept sending me little slips of paper with Bible quotes through the post to remind me how much God loves me. I still have them.

They also forgave me for some things I said and did which hurt them. He stunned me last year, as we were walking up a hill in Llandudno where he now lives, by telling me that he has three best friends -and that I am one of them. I can talk to Dave about anything. He is wise, direct and kind in his answers. He is someone I can rely on. I know he prays for me.

Chris



Friendship - I think it's making time for that person - and both people must want to give that time

And it takes time to trust each other

It goes in waves with me I think.

Speaking up - communication- being honest - being there for someone through everything - so important

The friendships I now have are two way - I have agonised over letting go of one way relationships, of which I had many. I find it's better to have a few good close friends.

FRIENDSHIPS

FRIENDSHIPS

My husband and I were married for almost 52 years. Friendship turned to love, trusting each other and walking together in sad times and happy times.

Feeling very secure.

49 years ago we helped set up a fellowship group for young people in Friern Barnett where we lived then. It welcomed people from all church denominations and we formed strong friendships. These have kept many of us meeting up over all these years and trusting one another in difficult situations, but made stronger through that. Judy



Reema came from India 18 years ago with her 18 months little girl to join her husband who was already over in the Reading area. The moment Reema and I saw each other we bonded instantly. I love children and my house was full of toys.

She and I were on the same wavelength. There was a buzz there between us - a deep trust and we shared all our fears and hopes with each other. Now we don't live that close but when we meet it's as if we'd seen each other every day. We catch up with each other's news and our bond is really strong. She is a friend for life. I feel like she is the sister I never had- the daughter I never had - so special. Anne-Marie

On friendship, I would say that a big influence on me were the girls of the Christian Fellowship Group at Winchester County High School for Girls, where I went for two years in the Sixth Form. Alison Marshall was one of the girls.

They invited me to a concert of Christian songs and poems one evening (with a hand-made paper invitation, with an appliqué yellow steam engine on it, as I recall). This made me feel welcome, when I was a bit "all at sea".

They also invited me to camping trip in the New Forest, to unwind after our last A-level exams. The facilities were a bit primitive, but it took our minds off the worry of failing to get the right grades. The scenery was good and we went shopping in Brockenhurst.

Again, I felt welcomed as part of a group, when I was a bit shy.

Hilary



Richard plumber/handyman



A good friend is someone you can call when your van breaks down in the middle of nowhere. The cam-belt broke when I was a long way west on the M4. I got rescued and taken to a garage and then home with my drill bits but my friend Giles drove me back to the garage to collect my tools from the van.





Know your Newts

meeting the people in our community

TUTU MELAKU

Many readers know Tutu from eating her delicious food and experiencing her wonderful smile. Not many know that twenty years ago, through no fault of her own, her life was unravelling. Due to her strength, faith and determination, and the kind intervention of women, one of whom became a lifelong friend, she was able to build a good life for herself and her children.

Were you born in Ethiopia?

Yes, in the capital, Addis Ababa. My father was a very happy, successful project manager and very good with people. Mum stayed at home and brought us up in the house where she still lives. I'm the second oldest. One of my brothers drowned at the age of 23 but I still say I have nine brothers and sisters because I still talk to him. (It took me many years to stop shaking near water and instead learn to swim.)

Ethiopians are famous for running ...

Yes, Eight years ago on a visit back home, I, and three of my friends, took turns to push my father, in a wheelchair after two strokes, round the 10 kilometre course of the Great Ethiopian Run. We were given our medals by Haile Gebrselassie, the world famous Olympian and World Champion at 10,000 metres. But a year later Daddy died. I was to run the London Marathon the next Saturday. I flew to Addis on the Tuesday. We buried him on the Wednesday and I landed back in London on the morning of the race. Biruk brought my running gear and I changed in the toilet at McDonald's. I hadn't slept for days but I completed it!

You had grown up and been to schools in Addis?

Yes, and after that, at 19, I went to college to learn secretarial science before becoming a secretary at The Ministry of Mines and Energy, where I met Solomon Assafa, a geophysicist, while typing up his and others' fieldwork reports. He became my boyfriend. I then moved to a higher paid job at a law firm. Solomon got a scholarship to study for a PhD at Reading University so I left my Ethiopian homeland and joined him, but I couldn't get work because my English wasn't good enough. At school in Addis, we had learned reading and writing in English but we hadn't practised speaking.

My dream of a good life in England was fading until I met Cleoni Parker who ran The *British Dyslexia Association* office on London Road. She could only offer me voluntary

befriended & befriending



At the family home in Addis

"My dream of a good life in England was fading"

secretarial work but gave me a reference for my first cleaning job so I finally had paid work. During that year she also paid for her friend Helen to give me intensive training in speaking English. Sally, a cleaner at Foley Hall where my husband and I lived, often accompanied me when I was job-hunting. At Christmas, Cleoni invited me to her home near Henley for three days. On Christmas morning, her three daughters woke up to stockings at the foot of their beds and a roaring fire - and so did I! She always introduced me to her friends, saying, "Her name is Tutu and she is a good friend of mine". She told me, "One day you will be a successful businesswoman." We became very good friends. Sadly, she died last year.

After marrying Solomon you had children?

In 1997, Bethlehem was born but in the evenings I still worked on the Prudential data entry desk.

Three years later I had Biruk, and Betty started at nursery. In 2002 we moved to our own house in Newtown. I still needed to work so I took a six-month evening class at Reading College in childminding. But I couldn't get mothers to leave their children with me. It was the first time I experienced racism.

However, another friend, Margaret Tower, took me to see the headteacher at St John's School. Mrs Donaldson sent three hundred letters home recommending me as a childminder. That afternoon the phone didn't stop ringing! The first mother that came to see me holding a large sheet of paper. I said, 'Can I pick her up?' Her daughter came to me and hugged me. The mother then said, "I don't think I need to ask all these questions." I had children from 6 months to 11 years old 5 days a week from 8 until 6 p.m. That was when I started feeding people.



The children loved my Ethiopian food! In the evenings I ran a mobile kitchen for children's parties, house parties and celebrations. But my relationship with Solomon was breaking down and we divorced. I still wanted him to see the children so I maintained a good relationship with him. Sadly he died earlier this year and we attended his funeral.

So you eventually went into catering full time?

One of the mums said, "I think you're at the stage now where you should be doing this catering as a business." But none of the pubs I tried would take me on. I contacted the trustees at RISC above their World Shop in London Street. I submitted a written proposal to take over the kitchen and took my friends Alan and Stewart to a meeting. My *Global Café* launched on October 31st 2006 and 144 people came! It was Betty's teacher, Ms Parsons, who came up with the name -*Tutu's Ethiopian Table*! My sister, Kidist, came from Canada to help me for the first 6 months. The kitchen was open from 12 til 3 and 6 til 9. At 3pm, I had to sprint to the school to pick up the children—I wanted to play with and cook for them—before running back to the café for 6. After 12 years there, I asked the



trustees to let me run the whole café but they said, "No", so I left and took a lease to run a café in Palmer Park. The Borough Council has been very supportive. We have just celebrated 5 years!

How did your children get on?

After St John's, they had a lovely, successful time at The Piggott School. Then, after A levels, Betty got her Masters in Civil Engineering at Surrey University with First Class Honours. She's now a Project Leader for Mott Macdonald Bentley. Biruk got his Masters in Civil Engineering at Manchester Uni and is Systems Lead at Hawk-Eye Innovations in London.

Wow! Cleoni and others have been good helpful friends but you have always believed in giving back and being a friend to others, haven't you?

At RISC I couldn't see my customers from the kitchen, so when I opened the café in Palmer Park I changed the layout so that I can see and talk to them while I'm cooking. The people who eat my food, whether Ethiopian or sandwiches and cakes, are also my friends. They become regulars and bring their friends. Also there are lots of groups who have made the café their home and anyone can come to sing, play, read their poems at our



monthly Tutu's Open Mic or just eat and listen.

Recently, with these musical and poetic friends, we organised my first community festival outside the café in the park. (See the next page for photos of that.)



Our parents brought us up to be loving and giving and our family is Ethiopian Orthodox Christian. In partnership with the charity *Together We Learn*, I set up *Tutu's Fund For The Future*.

/contd. overleaf

Know your Newts continued//



Tutu visiting the schools charity work in Ethiopia

Our charity works to help schools in poor villages outside Addis; they support children who will struggle to be well-educated like Betty and Biruk have been.

I sponsor five children - the sixth died - and am supporting the building of a classroom in one school and the refurbishing of classrooms in another two. I hold special fundraising evenings in our café to supplement what I can afford to send.



Thank you, Tutu. I know you are writing your autobiography. Thanks for giving us a preview!



Losing a good friend

Alfie, I'm remembering you as a little puppy licking my face; and when we first taught you to swim in the sea.

We've climbed mountains and ridges together, run and played ball, explored forests and bogs; then rested together evenings in front of a fire, cosy and dreaming, and that earthy damp doggy smell.

Now, I'm walking with you your last faltering steps. You still smile, pant a little and wag weakly, but your energy and enthusiasm is fading fast.

Blood from the cruel cancer in your mouth stains your beautiful huge front paws. It's near time to say farewell ...

My sadness triggers memories, and recalls to me the many good friends and family with whom I have already travelled a similar journey. Precious names and faces; tears, courage, quiet moments of togetherness, and glowing smiles. I begin to name them ...

Thank you for all my friends and loved ones, dear Jesus - and you the dearest of all, who gave your life for me - you stay with me still.

Ed.





Left: Our duck. Can you just spot her mottled brown feathers amongst the greenery?

- our eco team

Below: Some of our Eco Church team members in the small courtyard between Church and School.



Going for Gold

This June our church, St John & St Stephen's, was awarded Gold *Eco Church** status. (* see more at ecochurch.arocha.org.uk)

Why does this matter to us? asks Rosie Croft. I guess it's because we feel the importance of working to hold safely God's creation in a time when we are only too aware of climate change and the horrific decline in nature and biodiversity.

So what have we been doing? - well, lots of things, including:

- Starting the process of getting solar panels and heat pumps. This will decrease the church's dependence on fossil fuels (e.g. gas and oil) which have been the main cause of climate change.
- Working in the courtyard (between the worship space and some of the school classrooms), creating a garden to encourage insects and wildflowers where everyone can enjoy a tiny bit of nature.
- Talking to each of our parliamentary candidates to challenge them to work for our world should they be elected as our next MP.

- Bringing into our Worship an awareness of the intricate and vulnerable beauty of God's world and our dependence on nature and on God.

How wonderful it would be if we had a good world to hand over to our children and grandchildren - one not stressed by so much pollution and by so much inequality, and one not scarred by floods, droughts and fires.

Do let us know if you have ideas about how we can continue this journey of caring for our earth.

And what has been the highlight so far? Having a duck return to nest for a second year in our courtyard. She produced nine ducklings that needed walking down to the Kennet. Helping her gave us joy!



Right:
Leaving via
St John's
Café door.



Summer Holidays 25th July - 3rd Sept

Daily activities 9 am – 5 pm or 10 am -5 pm weekends

- ◆ Summer Family Activity Packs for all ages (from £2 per pack)
- ◆ Have a go at a variety of gallery and garden trails including our woodland brass rubbing trail.
- ◆ Free make-and-take and other hands-on activities (donations welcome)
- ◆ Try out our indoor Farming Cycle brass rubbing (subject to room availability)
- ◆ Have fun on the fabulous wooden play-on tractor and wagon.



Friday August 23rd Miller's Ark £2 Book soon

Meet farm animals in the beautiful MERL garden. 'My Way' session 10 am – 11.30 for neurodivergent visitors and their families

'For all' session 12.30 pm – 4 pm £2 in advance; £3 on the day. Bring a picnic

Mon September 2nd Museums

My Way for
neurodivergent
visitors of all ages
10 am – 2 pm
Free Book soon



0118 960 6060 readingmuseum.org.uk

Friday July 26th Victorian Schoolroom 11am and 2pm 1 hr £1 Book soon



Every Saturday 'Museums My Way'

for neurodivergent visitors and their families Between
10 am & 5 pm Free Drop In



Rhymetime

at Reading Museum every Wednesday 10.30-11 Free Drop In

Palmer Park Library Rhymetime Tuesday and Thursday 10:30
Free Drop In

Central Library Rhymetime Thursday 10.15 & 11:15;
Tuesday 10:30 Free Drop In



TV Series Review

by Chris Meunier

“Time - if we don’t make time for our friends, we soon won’t have any! ...”

Quote from series 2 episode 2

The series *The Chosen* has been running for several years now, but I only became aware of it through a set of lunchtime screenings at Reading College, where it drew student interest and sparked some quite searching discussions.

Unlike most big screen Biblical movies, the story lines are not too predictable, even though they draw quite faithfully

on material from the gospels. The story doesn’t even start with Jesus, but rather with plausibly woven back stories about individuals he would soon call to follow him. We get to experience the diversity of those characters and the tensions arising between them. So, we’ve quickly become ‘hooked’, anticipating our next chance to watch!

It’s free to view using an App - either ‘The Chosen’ or ‘Angel Studios’.

The CHOSEN

Download on the App Store

GET IT ON Google Play

‘Shine’ is the theme for this year’s Holiday Bible Club, being held at

Wycliffe Baptist Church, Reading Tuesday 27th - Friday 30th August, 9.30 - 12 noon

Entry via The Warehouse, 1a Cumberland Road, RG1 3LB

We will be blasting off into outer space to discover the greatest light with lots of fun and games, singing and craft. ‘Shine’ will cost £8 per child for 4 days if you sign up in advance; or £10 on the door the first day, or £3 a day thereafter (please do get in touch if the cost is an issue for you)

Find out more by signing up for the club using the link <https://forms.office.com/e/43FFwKUZ4y> or scan the QR Code below. If you would like a paper booking form, please do ask.

We would like to invite the **whole family** to celebrate the week with us on Saturday 31st August from 5pm to 6.30pm.

If you need more information about Shine, please contact alison@wycliffe-church.org.uk

Let’s blast off together!





Two young adults got very wet at church on the last Sunday of June. Anton and Katniss both chose to show their acceptance of Jesus' love and their commitment to follow him, by being fully immersed in water - i.e. baptism.



This act symbolises more than just a cleansing — firstly, being joined to Jesus in his death and burial, but then also rising with him to new life in his Spirit!



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
or email: office@stjohnandststephen.org.uk



Free Fairtrade
Tea & Coffee

Term time activities:

Monday 9 - 11.30

Open to anyone in need of tea/coffee and a conversation - there's always someone here to chat to, and plenty of toys for pre-schoolers to play with

Tuesday 10.30 - 12.30 - Craft Café

Knit and natter, bring your sewing projects, learn something new or just chat

Wednesday 10.30 - 12.30 Fireside

Spirituality for the not-so-certain. A relaxed and informal discussion about life, the universe and everything for those who don't attend on Sunday mornings

1.30 - 3.30 Oasis - Women only

Soup lunch followed by study group

Thursday 10.30 - 12 - Informal Café Communion

or *Lectio Divina* - chat over coffee afterwards

Fridays - we're usually open first thing, with films once a term

Check noticeboard for this term's film

At St John and St Stephen's Church, Orts Road

stjohnandststephen.org.uk



School Contacts



Head Teacher
Polly Cornish



Deputy Head Teacher
Kate Hawkins

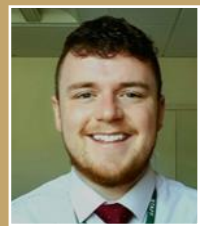


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