



# MARK'S MESSENGER

*The Parish Magazine of  
St Mark's Church, Broomhill and Broomhall, Sheffield*

Autumn 2024



**RENEWED**



**RELEASED**



**REJUVENATED**

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## RENEWED, RELEASED AND REJUVENATED



Some of you will remember that Michael's theme for January 2024 edition of The Messenger was 'renewed'. This reminded me of our Diocesan strategy which is known as the '3Rs' – Renewed, Released, Rejuvenated – and sets out how we are asked to realise the Diocesan vision. If you are not familiar with this, it's that:

*'The Diocese of Sheffield is called to grow a sustainable network of Christ-like, lively and diverse Christian communities in every place, which are effective in making disciples and in seeking to transform our society and God's world.'*

The Diocese considers that each of the '3R's' contributes to the growth of the Church.

### **Renewed**

Renewed centres us on our dependence on the grace of God for the fruitfulness and effectiveness of the Diocesan strategy. Bishop Pete wrote:

*'If we are to realise our vision for the Diocese of Sheffield, so that by 2025 we are flourishing generously, then it will be because we have maintained as a first priority a real reliance on the Spirit of God in prayer and worship and in the consecration of our lives, as individuals and communities.'*

## **Released**

The strategy wants to release parishes as far as possible from current constraints (eg administrative and compliance demands; of inherited structures and buildings) and to liberate untapped potential of individual disciples and whole congregations to release the whole people of God for the whole mission of God.

This has several strands including identifying focal ministers – people who are the public face of the church to their congregation / community, who take responsibility for the delivery and ministry, and through stewardship – ensuring we have the resources (financial and human) needed to support the people and causes we care about.

## **Rejuvenated**

The Diocese is committed to ‘growing the Church younger’, more diverse and planting new congregations. One of the priorities of the national strategy of the Church of England is ‘To be a Church where mixed ecology is the norm – where every person in England has access to an enriching and compelling community of faith by adding new churches and new forms of Church...’.

All this might sound unrelated to what we do at St Mark’s but in reality as a community we are always adapting and changing what we do to meet the challenges we face in ministering to those in need within our congregation, community and the wider world.

Our vision is to practise a living, thinking, loving, faith.

*Living faith which is inclusive, vibrant and engaged.*

*Thinking faith which engages with scripture, tradition, reason and experience.*

*Loving faith which serves our communities.*

Growing in faith and discerning how we are called to serve God and one another is an ongoing process and continues throughout our lifetime. We want to be an inclusive church, but can be perceived by others as being

exclusive. We are a diverse congregation with a wide range of beliefs and opinions who have a lot to give. We also have much to learn from others and in this issue, you will find contributions from:

- Our children – we hear their voices about what is important to them about St Mark's;
- Matthew Smith, a member of night service, who shares a poem he discovered which was written about St Mark's Church after it was bombed;
- Sue updates us following her move to Holy Rood House;
- David Price demonstrates how grass roots work can influence decisions made at General Synod;
- Pat Hunt writes about how the European Association for Psychotherapy is standing alongside the Ukrainian people in their darkest hour;
- A Diocesan update on how the renewed, released, rejuvenated strategy is playing out plus what we at St Mark's are doing or how we are benefiting from the strategy;
- Boyd Morgan looks back at the history of us hosting Big Queer Carols and forward to this years planned service;
- Michael and Pauline Miller offer book reviews on *Manifesto – The Battle for Green Britain* and *Wonder Beyond Belief – On Christianity*.

I hope you'll find something that interests you.

**Shan**

**The next Edition of The Messenger will be edited by Frances Gray.**

**It will be distributed in December.**

**Please send contributions to Frances by early November for inclusion.**

## **REJUVENATED**

### ***Children's Consultation***

There are now over 30 families registered for St Mark's Children and family's provision which is a significant proportion of the overall congregation. The Church of England has a priority 'to be a Church that is younger and more diverse' and seeks to double the number of children and young active disciples in the Church of England by 2030.

When children and adults worship together we enhance a sacred space and connect on various levels. We learn from one another and grow in faith together. There's a special dynamic that is created by children and adults contributing to the tradition to which we belong. We need each other as we learn to recognise God's presence, listen for God speaking into our lives today and respond as we go out into the world beyond the physical building. Just as we seek adult's views about St Mark's, we also need to hear the children's voices. In addition to asking parents to represent their children's views in the consultation about what is important to people about St Mark's, the Crèche and Godly Play leaders spent time asking the children how they felt about church and observing and notating their responses.

### **Crèche**

In Crèche, the children were invited to play with the 'cardboard church' which began as an empty building along with a box of resources (possible church furniture, people, etc) that they could use as they wanted:

S: put out the altar and pulpit, and put the candle in it. He also placed the flowers in next to the altar.

C: 'pillows' – and put these in place. She also carefully chose the people and put them in. The first thing S chose to use was a little toy cup: and said 'dahs a teapot'.

C also chose a box of juice, and wanted to put that in the church.

O found all the people he could see and put them all in the church.





We (the Children's Leaders) feel that these observations reflect the core ideas we try to support throughout our children's provision:

- That church is a welcoming and inclusive space (to them and many people);
- That it is comfortable and offers hospitality;
- That we use ritual and symbols such as candles, flowers, the cross and altar to create sacred space and explore/express spirituality.

N.B. The context of this play was entirely centred around the cardboard church, which did not enable children to express their connection with the outdoor church space and nature. But this is also a very important part of church for the young people both as a space for worship and also for play and hospitality.

### Godly Play:

Sarah introduced the topic by presenting the story *The Good Shepherd and the World Communion*, then, during the wondering, picking up the figure of the priest and talking about Sue leaving us. She then outlined what is going to happen next – and that it won't happen very quickly! – and explained that we are going to tell people who might want to apply to be our next vicar all about us and what's important to us, so they can decide if they want to come and join us. And since our children are really important to us, we want to include what they think! She told them that what they said would be shared with others but not their names. Here are their responses:



What do you like about coming to church?

Physical environment:

- The stained glass
- The spire

Social environment:

- Sunday activities for children
- Seeing friends
- Being in a welcoming place
- Biscuits

Is there anything you would like to see improved?

- New play equipment for church on the green.

What do you like about church on the green?

- Fresh air
- Fun
- Interesting
- Being a green church in a green city

In addition to these sessions where children were invited to share their thoughts, we have asked them to show us what is important to them about church by putting together an exhibition of their photographs. These are displayed at the back of church.

Below are few images which are an expression of the ways in which we explore sacred space, worship and faith dialogue with our children and young people.

**Hannah Jones**



## THOUGHTS ABOUT A POEM ON ST MARK'S



*The Crescent* was the campus magazine for the teacher training college which was the predecessor to what is now the Sheffield Hallam campus, just down the road from St Mark's. The following is a poem submitted to *The Crescent* campus magazine in 1955. This was buried within the pages of the issue in question, and quite possibly has not been read since:



***Saint Mark's Church*** by ***E. Hirstwood*** (circa 1955)

No choir sings now in the empty chancel,  
No organ echoes majestic lay,  
No bells ring out from the dusty steeple –  
The belfry steps have fallen away,  
No priest speaks forth from the crumbling pulpit,  
Young saplings now from the altar grow,  
And autumn leaves rust in the transepts,  
Like the leaves of the prayer books long ago,  
The jagged walls stretch out to the heavens,  
Charred rafters mould'ring and rotting lie,  
A broken arch, clad in clinging ivy,  
Strains praying hands to a twilit sky,  
The pegs where the choir boys hung their cassocks,  
Lie twisted and warped, and rusting away.  
A stained 'veneer' drops from a window,  
Grass grows where the people knelt to pray,  
The rising wind whispers blurred responses  
A weathered eagle bows its head.  
The grasping claws of a writhing briar  
Coil round the gravestones that mark the dead.  
A sad stone bishop hangs on the wall  
With hollow eyes and heart of clay,  
Yet the restless hands on the clock move on  
Counting the speeding hours of the day,  
But the works are old, and the hour hand lags,  
And nobody comes to set it right.  
One last oak door, creaks still on its hinge  
But the church is left to the things of the night.

During my recent faith-based reflections, I have been meditating on the importance of knowing our roots, and our history. One of my first 'takeaways' from worshipping at St. Mark's was the rebuilding of the church post-war as a physical, living testament to what can be achieved when people come together through faith. I thought this also to be a lovely metaphor for personal healing through faith we can experience as individuals periods of destruction followed by healing and rebuilding. Just like the physical building of the church was rebuilt with beautiful results, so we can heal and rebuild.

***Matthew Smith***

## NEWS FROM HOLY ROOD HOUSE

Hello friends!



It hardly seems like five minutes since we were all saying goodbye and yet it feels like I have been here at Holy Rood House for much longer than a couple of months. When Shan asked me whether I would like to write an update for the Messenger, I jumped at the chance.

I would like to begin by thanking you again for the thirteen years we shared together at St Mark's. As some of you will know I was quite a reluctant Vicar. I was never very keen on organised religion and the thought of standing at the front and (heaven forbid) preaching, quite frankly, terrified me. When I arrived at St Mark's I was very anxious. At the end of my interview as Associate Vicar the Archdeacon had said, "There are no 'back of the fag-packet' sermons here." What, on earth, did I think I was doing?

Over thirteen years, together we worked out how to do church as well as we could.

We were never going to get it right for everyone, but we considered what a Living, Thinking and Loving Faith might look like. My faith grew and my ability to articulate what I mean when I talk about God was kneaded and shaped, baked, broken, and shared with you, and I am grateful for the way you shared your bread with me too.

So, what about Holy Rood House?

Our strapline is "The Place to Come to" and we are looking for our own 'four words' to help people consider what they might come here for.

The first word could be 'healing' except that it is so problematic; is 'wellbeing' better? Often people come to Holy Rood because life is tough, and this is a place where they can admit how things really are. With that honesty comes the ability to consider different perspectives, returning home lighter and less overwhelmed (renewed, perhaps?).

But it is not all about our emotional journey. We are also passionate about learning. This is a place to come to ask big questions, to consider what others are saying about G\*D and whether she is relevant anymore; to consider what faith and theology might mean to us today. Sibylle is

looking at opening our library to a wider audience, inviting speakers to come and stimulate our thinking. Come and let your imagination be released!

Another knotty word is 'faith' or 'spirituality'. This is a place to come to, to explore what this might mean for us. Our chapel faces the garden, so our prayers are always connected with the seasons and the vibrant life all around us. We also have a tiny sacred space for contemplative prayer, the Sophia Chapel, where people can simply be. Prayer undergirds everything we do here but is not limited by particular forms or expectations and may simply involve listening to the birdsong.

Which brings us to the last of our four words: 'creativity'. We are blessed with a well-stocked art room where people can use colour and shape and materials which might help them in their explorations without relying on words. Everything we do here invites a Spirit of creativity, working with the raw materials of our life experiences and helping each other to be as alive as possible, even when life does not feel positive. Play might even help some people to feel rejuvenated!



We are currently working on a new website (you may see some similarities with yours at St Mark's!) and we're going to explore these four areas to help us communicate how Holy Rood might be the place for you to turn to, at a time of need or to give you space to think. It is when we give ourselves time and space to be that we enter more fully into our journey of healing: a journey which also benefits our relationships, our communities and the issues facing our world.

Please do visit us, help us to shape what we do here and let your friends and neighbours know that we are here (whatever their beliefs)

so that we can continue to explore what it means to be human beings who are fully alive.

**Sue**

## INFLUENCING GENERAL SYNOD



On Monday, 8 July, I sat in the public gallery at York University Central Hall listening to a long debate at the Church of England's General Synod on 'Food Banks and Inadequacies in Social Security.' The debate was introduced by the Venerable Malcolm Chamberlain, Archdeacon of Sheffield and Rotherham. He said that it was a scandal that so many people were now dependent upon food banks for the food that they and their families needed. This situation had arisen from changes in social security. A well informed and moving debate followed. Some of the speakers were clergy and laity from poor parishes who talked about the poverty afflicting their parishioners. Other speakers were Bishops who were ready to take up these issues with

Government Ministers. There were some helpful amendments. The debate ended with a vote — 274 in favour, one against and no abstentions.

I went back to Sheffield very satisfied as I had drafted the original motion in 2021. In this article, I will set out the tortuous process we had to go through to stimulate a debate at General Synod.

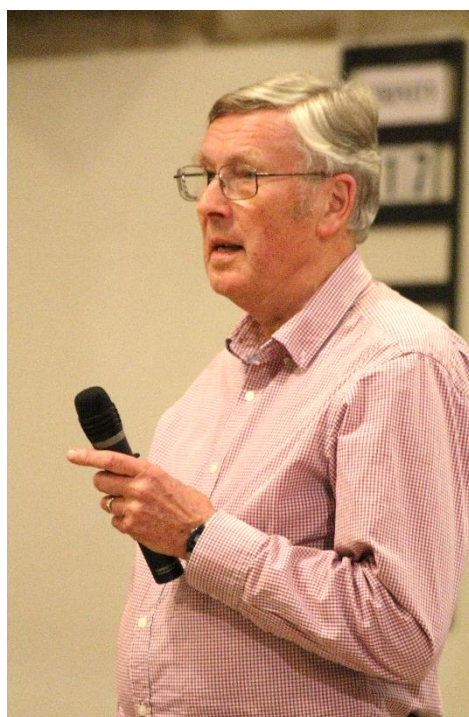
When I joined the Diocesan Board of Faith and Justice ten years ago, there was some uncertainty as to its direction. Diocesan strategy had changed. It was now all about church growth. The Diocesan staff previously employed on regeneration projects had been replaced by staff concerned with supporting parishes, church plants and evangelism. Steve Millwood, a long-standing Board member, and I (acting as secretary), set up a Poverty and Inequality Group to work on initiatives that might help the Diocese to recover its previous emphasis on social justice.

One of our suggestions to the Board was that we should put a motion to General Synod arguing that the growth of food banks, many of them staffed by Anglican volunteers, was undesirable and was due to the austerity cuts in social security which needed to be reversed. Our then Board Chair, Archdeacon Malcolm Chamberlain, was a member of General Synod. He welcomed our motion but explained the process to us. First, we had to get a Deanery Synod to put forward our motion to Diocesan Synod. Then Diocesan

Synod had to decide whether to put it to General Synod. A long wait would follow whilst the organisers of General Synod meetings identified a time where our motion would fit into the agenda.

We embarked on this lengthy process. In 2022 Hallam Deanery Synod, to which St Mark's belongs and which is chaired by the Vicar of St John's, Ranmoor, readily adopted our motion, and sent it forward to Diocesan Synod who also endorsed it and sent it to the General Synod secretariat. As Malcolm had warned, we were advised that there would not be space on the agenda for a year or two. To keep the pot boiling, one of our lay members of General Synod, Michaela Suckling, asked questions of the bishops on our behalf and received positive responses from the Bishop of Manchester.

In autumn 2023, we were notified that our motion might be debated at General Synod in February 2024, and I was asked to produce a background paper to offer context. I did some research, and we sent my paper to the Secretariat. We were initially disappointed when the debate on our motion was put back to the July meeting in York, but as it turned out, this was ideal timing as it was just after the General Election leading to a change of Government. My paper was widely circulated, and the Synod secretariat provided a supportive paper as well. In the debate, four amendments were proposed by Synod members. One amendment was rightly turned down by Synod. But both Malcolm and Synod accepted three other amendments, adding clauses about disabled people, the two-child limit in social security and the Essentials Guarantee proposed by the Trussell Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The final motion was more wordy but also more comprehensive than the motion we had prepared.



Altogether this was a very worthwhile process. The strength of opinion expressed in the debate will have influenced the bishops to take this issue up seriously with Ministers. Sheffield Diocese was achieving prominence as a Diocese concerned about issues of social justice (which do now feature in its strategy). The Board of Faith and Justice was delighted to have made a difference.

**David Price**

national retreat week

**renew:all**

21 – 28 sept 2024



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## STANDING BESIDE UKRAINIANS IN THEIR DARK HOUR



Amidst the chaos and fog of war, the Ukrainian and European Psychotherapy Alliance – a group of a dozen senior Psychotherapists from Ukraine and the European Association for Psychotherapy – are resourcing Ukrainian Psychotherapists through presenting a series of online Symposia. The Symposia are highly successful and have proved to be a valuable resource to more than 1000 Psychotherapists not only from Ukraine and Europe but also from the US and Australia.

*A Ukrainian Psychotherapist said: 'It is so valuable to belong to a vast group of Psychotherapists across Europe through these Symposiums. It empowers me in my work, in my life and in my being. It means so much to me.'*

The first symposium, focusing on ethics, was held on the first anniversary of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2023. It was Carl Jung who said that for psychotherapists it is our first task to understand the psychological situation of our time, and to clearly see the problems and challenges which people are facing.

The psychological situation and major events of our time, including the war in Ukraine, is of social devastation, displacement, and a refugee crisis. The existential challenges manifested by these social realities present us with dilemmas challenging our established basic principles and ethical norms. Ethics are particularly important for Ukrainian psychotherapists in helping individuals to live in their new and rapidly changing conditions.

The theme for the Fourth Symposium, marking the second anniversary of the full-scale invasion, was 'The Tragedy of Childhood in the Time of War.' Our focus on the children of Ukraine – both children soon to be born, and children in their infancy and adolescence – united everyone involved. It united us in compassion for them; in anger and outrage at the horrors they are facing which we wish with all our hearts would stop; in anguish for the children separated from their families and their fathers' and their homeland; in tears for those children who have lost their lives in the war; and in despair for children who have suffered psychological, emotional and physical injury as a result of the war.

We are also united in joy for the miracles that have happened to children. Like Roman, a young boy badly burned by a Russian missile. His mother died in the blast, and he suffered 80% burns, but miraculously he is recovering. Before the war he loved ballroom dancing, and now he has begun to dance beautifully again, and he has returned to school. He has not given up, just as the entire Ukrainian people have not given up. Their spirit is incredibly strong.

The Symposia unite us and connect us. This is so important during war where there is disconnectedness, isolation, fear, and uncertainty. Through the Symposia and through our speakers we are creating a body of wisdom, inspiration, and primary research. Everything is available in English, Ukrainian and Czech on our website: <https://uasymposium.online>

We organise small discussion groups at each of the Symposia to give the opportunity for dialogue between Ukrainian and European psychotherapists, to share experience, and emotions, to support and have empathy for each other, and to help each other.

Hope is such a precious thing especially in the current trauma of war. From the feedback we receive, the Symposia are a lifeline for Ukrainian psychotherapists in their exhausting and traumatic work during the war and give them renewed hope. The light of hope can so easily go out, and yet we can help each other by re-kindling the light.

We are supporting Ukrainians in their aim to be strong in the face of aggression. They find that the aggression they are facing evokes hate, but ways can be found not to give in to hate. Hate can become internally negative and destructive, and it is better to use the same energy to stay on the high ground and hold dignity and integrity. Ukrainians are teaching us and modelling this for us now.



The Ukrainian and European Psychotherapy Alliance is a significant and important group. We have been meeting every three or four weeks online since October 2022 to envision and organize the Symposia, and we have become very close to each other. The meetings are conducted in English and Ukrainian and there is rich dialogue, laughter, and shared humour is enhanced, not lost in translation. Whilst war rages around the Ukrainian colleagues, at times only a kilometre away, they do not despair. Crucially and impressively, they will not allow themselves to become victims of their situation, and they feel embarrassed if we express too much compassion. They say that if they take on a victim persona, then their positive hopes for themselves and the future of their country will be undermined. They hold incredible courage, dignity, integrity, honour, and hope so that within our group we are partners, we are equals. Our work on the Symposia reflects this atmosphere, and in a parallel process way the Symposia express what is best in Ukrainians and in humanity – courage, dignity, integrity, honour and hope.

We have been surprised how successful and influential the Symposia are even beyond the world of psychotherapy. The second Symposium attracted the support and patronage of President Petr Pavel of the Czech Republic.

The fifth Symposium in June, 2024 was attended by Oleksandr Korniyenko, Deputy Chairman of the Ukrainian Parliament. He gave an excellent and very knowledgeable opening address, in which he thanked all the Ukrainian psychotherapists present at the Symposium for their vital, healing work during the war. It seems that through the Symposia we are reaching a wide audience beyond the world of Psychotherapy, and this is very powerful.

No-one knows how long the war will go on for, but the Alliance are committed in their work together to continue to support Ukrainian psychotherapists for as long as the war lasts. We have planned, scheduled, and organised finance for Symposia through until June 2025. We are standing beside Ukrainians in their dark hour.

On a personal note, I am astonished to find myself giving leadership to this work. Some words from John's gospel echo: 'You did not choose me; I chose you.' I was asked to become President of EAP and then elected, and I was in this role as the full-scale war started in Ukraine. Somehow this has released capacities in me that I didn't even know were there, and has also released an extraordinary stream of work with Ukrainian psychotherapists, and I am full of gratitude for all of this.

***Pat Hunt***



# THE DIOCESE OF SHEFFIELD

## Strategy Delivery Update

In 2018, we (The Diocese of Sheffield) set out our strategy to be Renewed, Released and Rejuvenated by 2025, with local mission and ministry being resourced across mission areas led by ordained Oversight Ministers and congregation-based Focal Ministers. What does some of this look like so far?

### Renewed

Over 1,400 people have now signed up to the Prayer Community and are praying for the renewal of the Diocese. Deanery prayer events, to pray for the mission of the churches in each deanery and take our prayers out into the community, took place across the Diocese in May 2024 as part of Thy Kingdom Come. Events included pilgrimages, picnics, and worship in different traditions, and around 240 people took part.

#### **We are asked to Pray For:**

- **parishes and Mission Areas in vacancy; may they feel supported, and identify the right person to lead them in the future**
- **Racial Justice and a more inclusive, diverse Diocese**
- **a successful funding application to national church for resources to help with mission and ministry in our next chapter as a Diocese**

### Released

Our Mission Area Support teams continue to support parishes across the Diocese. The Church Operations & Buildings team has recently launched a Bid Writing eLearning resource. Designed in-house by our Communications & Learning team and specifically for church use, this resource offers a step-by-step guide to Bid Writing to maximise your chance of a successful bid.

**The Diocesan HR team are currently supporting St Mark's to develop resources that will enable us to be more consistent in the way we navigate employment related issues and enhance our paid employees' and volunteers' well-being.**

Lights for Christ is a model developed by the Diocese of Sheffield to help Christian disciples to explore their baptismal calling to live out their Christian faith in the world.

There are now 107 authorised Focal Ministers across the Diocese serving the church, nurturing the parish and congregation by delivering ministry and undertaking mission.

The first Church Explorer's Week – opening places of worship to the public - was a great success! 24 churches took part, offering a range of activities and events, encouraging everyone to explore our churches:

### **Heritage Open Days**

**Although St Mark's has not taken part in Church Explorers week, all our Mission Area churches open their doors for England's largest festival of history and culture and take part in heritage open days each September.**

### **Rejuvenated**

Small Sparks grants, (to help kick-start missional activities) are available across the Diocese. So far we have awarded 13 grants for a range of activities, including craft resources and food for a Brunch service, foldable tables to improve flexibility of space to enable a range of missional activities, audio-visual equipment and kitchen supplies for a new congregation, promotional video and materials for weekly Christ-focused addictions recovery support and equipment to enable neurodivergent people in church to flourish and engage with God. All these activities are part of a clear mission pathway and intentionally support people to progress in their faith.

**Did you know the Diocese has just awarded St Mark's a £2000 grant to enable us to extend our children's and family work beyond St Mark's by developing a children's choir and offering outreach into local schools through music?**

# Being Built Together

# Being Fruitful Together

A day of networking, fellowship and the sharing of ideas + building up UK Minority Ethnic/Global Majority Heritage leaders of all ages, ordained + lay, along with allies + supporters

**Sheffield Cathedral**

19th October 2024: 10am - 4pm

**Speakers:**

**Rev Sarah Siddique Gill**

St. James Church, Assistant Archdeacon for Blackburn

**Ven Karen Belinda Lund**

Archdeacon of Manchester

**Rev Guy Hewitt**

Director of the Racial Justice Unit



For more information:  
**call 07952 833858**

Register here:

**<https://forms.office.com/e/uoAP3EDwH9>**

Anesia Cook has been appointed as the Diocese of Sheffield's Racial Justice Officer. This new three-year role is funded by the national church's Racial Justice Unit. The first phase of Anesia's work in 2024 will be listening and learning. On 19 October, 2024, the Racial Justice Unit, in partnership with the Diocese of Sheffield, will be holding a one-day conference 'Being Built Together, Being Fruitful Together' at the cathedral.

**We are planning to invite Anesia to preach at St Mark's in 2025.**

### **Strategy 2032: towards a revitalised Diocese**

In the autumn Archdeacon Malcolm Chamberlain and Strategic Programme Director Alex Shilkoff will be visiting all Twinned Deaneries to share the refreshed strategy and discuss what this can mean for people locally.

**The Ecclesfield & Hallam event took place on 12 September 2024 as part of Deanery Synod**



## BIG QUEER CAROLS



Its early, I know, but I really wanted to let you know we will be running Big Queer Carols again this year. This will be the third time St Mark's has hosted this event. Let me give you a little background information. St Mark's was initially approached by OneBodyOneFaith in 2022 about hosting Big Queer Carols, a service with an explicit welcome for LGBTQIA+ people. OneBodyOneFaith was keen for churches outside the London area to use their format for a Christmas service. At first Sue hesitated because our approach is to make all St Mark's services open and inclusive, but it was agreed that there was also space for something a bit different.

Despite it being a very icy night, the first Big Queer Carol Service of this nature held at St Mark's was well attended by over 100 people. The congregation comprised different people and the needs of those attending this particular service could not have been met as effectively at our regular Carol Service.

Offering Big Queer Carols gives a clear message to LGBTQIA+ people, their families and friends, that St Mark's acknowledges the pain caused by homophobia, hostility, rejection or exclusion, and that we can take brave steps to create safe enough spaces where people are affirmed, and healing can begin. Jesus took brave, subversive steps to enable all to know they were loved by God. The whole body of the Church of England needs to take steps like this to truly enable healing to take place. It made perfect sense for us to run Big Queer Carols again in 2023. Attendees were of all ages, including many friendship groups and families with their young children. Talking to people who came to the

service, it was clear that people of all faiths and none chose to visit St Mark's for this event. Christians of different denominations were present, as well as Muslims, Jews, and Pagans. Several partner groups were invited to have a presence at the event. They included individuals from 'Out Aloud', the Sheffield LGBT+ choir, many of whom volunteered to support the carol singing.

There were stalls from 'SAYIT', the Sheffield charity that supports LGBTQIA+ young people between the ages of 8 and 25, and 'Juno Books', Sheffield's feminist and queer bookshop. As it was also Human Rights Sunday, Sheffield Amnesty International also had a stall, which was supported by many of their volunteers, and a card was available to be sent to an LGBTQ+ activist, as also happened the previous year. The attendance of other organisations helped to foster a community atmosphere at the event, and was appreciated by these groups, many of whom had no idea that the church could be this inclusive. Whilst this was a Christian service, it was clearly also perceived as a community event that everyone felt comfortable to attend. The large number of people (c. 250) and the positive feedback we received shows the need for this to be continued as an annual event at St Mark's.

With all this in mind, and the size of this event last year, we are looking for volunteers to support this amazing and important service this year. Could you be part of the welcome team, help to prepare and serve refreshments in the kitchen, decorate the Church or be a spare pair of hands on the evening? It would be great to have as many as possible to help with the smooth running of this service, and of course all are welcome!

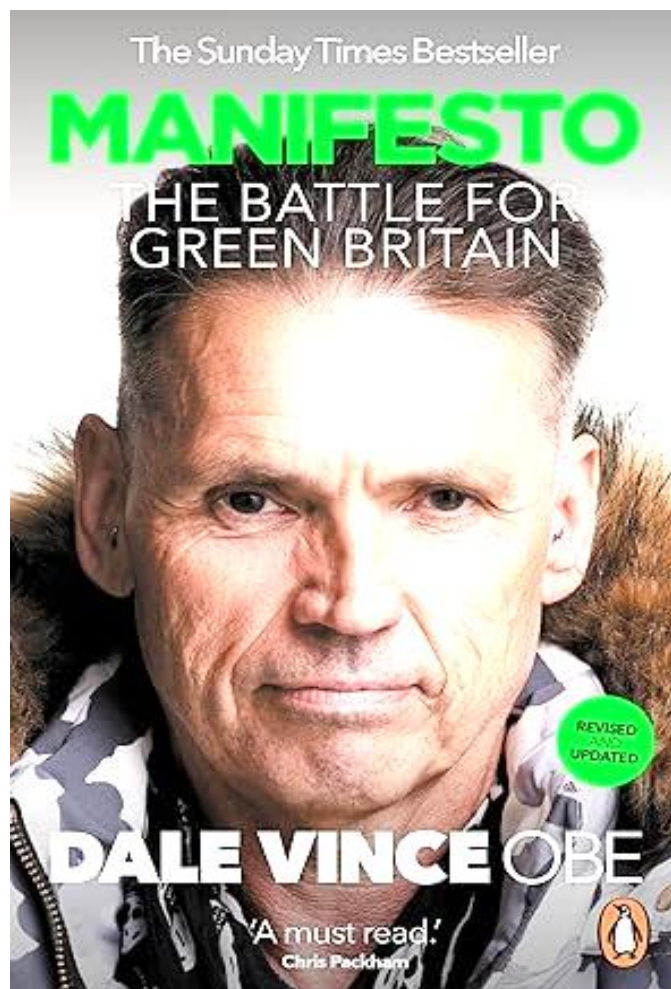
If you did feel able to support us on the evening of December 15, could you either contact Zoe in the office or Boyd: [boydhackley@icloud.com](mailto:boydhackley@icloud.com) or 07900432569.

Big Queer Carols is just one representation of how St Mark's living, thinking, loving, faith works to fully affirm LGBTQIA+ people within their church community. This vision is one that we pray will be realised in other churches too.

**Boyd**

## BOOK REVIEW:

*Manifesto: The Battle for Green Britain* by Dale Vince OBE<sup>1</sup>



Dale Vince is a pioneer of renewables, being the founder of Ecotricity and the world's first electric car charging network, Electric Highway. Written in a direct unpolished style, and illustrated with 43 photographs, it vividly describes how after a troubled childhood and a serious motorbike accident aged 16 and, later, in the 1990s, after leaving an abusive relationship, he went on the road with his 18-month-old son in an old ambulance, so he is a something of a maverick. Subsequent years saw him having many adventures and run-ins with authority, as part of the traveller community. However, having to be self-reliant and off-grid, led to his involvement in developing small scale, then gradually larger wind turbines, eventually setting up a public supply company. So, the book is also partly a history of the development of renewable electricity supply in the UK as well as chronicling his growing awareness and understanding of how the three main carbon emission sectors – energy supply, transport and food production – also link in with factors such as unfettered capitalism, social inequality and more. 'Capitalism got us into this mess. The rampant burning of fossil fuels that has created the climate crisis has



been driven more than anything else by the current version of capitalism – which you might think of as the Thatcher version, the every-person-for-themselves, dog-eat-dog version’; he makes no secret of his detestation of Conservative policies and indeed encourages readers to vote for Labour.

The meat of the book is thus around the challenges we face on our way to net zero and exegesis of action that we, governments and businesses need to take to achieve this. One minor irritation for me is his use of ‘windmills’ when he is referring to wind turbines, and a disagreement with his claims that growing grass for anaerobic bio-digestion into methane is a workable, carbon neutral energy solution; we would need a huge acreage of grass, and burning methane releases carbon dioxide (I think the same about claims for burning wood pellets in power stations). He also espouses tidal lagoons (think Severn barrage), an excellent dependable power source, and the use of electric trains based on an electric engine pulling a battery carriage as a much cheaper method of electrification than adding overhead gantries. Along the way with a Lotus engineer, he also created an early electric car, the Nemesis, in 2010, which broke the world electric speed record at 151 mph in 2012. His ownership of Forest Green Rovers led to it becoming the world’s first fully ‘green’ football club.

***Two final quotations:***

‘This is a battle for a truly Green Britain – we not only need to be self-sufficient in green energy but along the way we can clean up the air that we breathe, the water we drink (and try to swim in), the food we eat and the land itself, bringing back nature in the process.’

‘We need to fight the election based on economic issues: jobs, pay, sustainable economic growth. Only a green economy can give us these now. It can also give us energy independence, with lower bills and fuel security. It is not about the climate, that is just the icing on the cake. I stopped making the climate case for action a long time ago. The economic case is unarguable and the one that resonates with people the most. It speaks to their most immediate concerns. Action on the climate will always look like a luxury compared to action to create jobs, control living costs and make living standards better. These are the outcomes of a green economy. The climate shouldn't and can't lead the argument.’

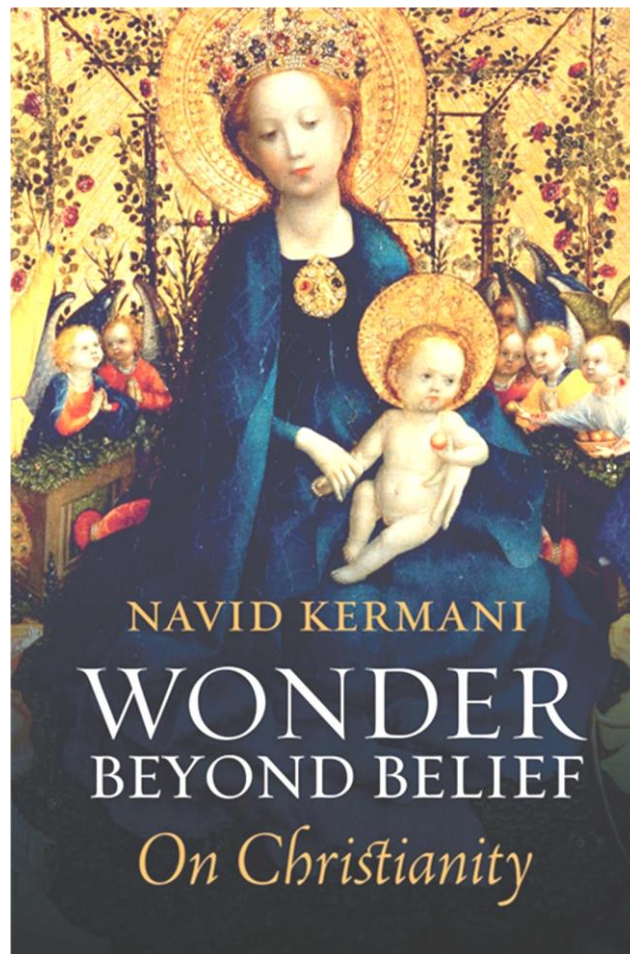
Hear, hear!

***Michael Miller***

<sup>1</sup>*Manifesto: The Battle for Green Britain* by Dale Vince OBE, 281 pages, Penguin, 2024

## BOOK REVIEW:

*Wonder Beyond Belief – On Christianity* by Navid Kermani



I was drawn to this book by a brief review in the Guardian, describing it as ‘funny, outrageous, touching, intimate and glorious.’ Having read it, I do not think I would quarrel with any of those adjectives. It is truly an extremely unusual book, consisting of a series of meditations on Christianity by an eminent Muslim scholar, each one sparked off by an image in Christian art. Icons, work by Veronese, Durer, Bellini, Rembrandt, Caravaggio (who seems a particular favourite) and of course Anon. all figure and spark off thoughts about the background of the artists and their times, and comments on the appearance of the figures in the art. These are not always very polite, but they are done with affection and with a perceptive eye. Often, he is voicing what many of us might think when we contemplate a piece of sacred art – describing a statuette of the Holy Child as ugly and referring to him as ‘snot-face’. Or, in a piece about The Wedding of Cana in Galilee: ‘Anyway, who takes his mother to a wedding? ... Just looking at his mother, you can see that she is a wet blanket.’

These are typical irreverent remarks, yet the whole tone of the book is one of such affection and admiration for some aspects of Christianity that it is impossible to take offence. And the criticisms, of course, are not of the story or the people in the story, but of how the artist has depicted them. Two of the essays stand out particularly for me – chiefly, I think, because they go against the main theme of the book (Christian art) and are meditations on other facets of Christianity. One, on the life and work of a Jesuit priest, called Paolo Dall'Oglio, is based around the work of the Mar Musa monastery, which he founded in the Syrian desert. Having criticised the Syrian regime for its massacres of people demonstrating in support of democracy, Father Paolo has now been banished from the country and the monastery abandoned, though his supporters are still active in other countries. Finally in 2013 he was kidnapped, after arranging to meet with ISIS representatives. The amazing feature of his small monastic community in its heyday was the way in which friendship and understanding was forged with local Muslim villagers to the extent that shared worship was possible, and the monks and nuns kept the Ramadan fast alongside their Muslim friends. There is a lot more to the account that I do not have space to recount, but it is an amazing story about a gentle and courageous man.

Another atypical essay is that on St Francis of Assisi and particularly his trip to Egypt in 1219, when he attempted to build bridges with the Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil there, in marked contrast to the support by the Church authorities (including the then Pope Innocent III) for the 5th Crusade. Again, it is a long and complex story, but one which sheds fascinating new light on St Francis and his courage in defying the powers of both the ecclesiastical and the civil authorities of his day. We tend to stereotype the saint as the man who cares for the poor, and befriends birds and animals, but this account sheds a new light on his pacifism, his ability to communicate with those of another faith, and his courage in undertaking this journey, at great personal risk.

If this account has stimulated your curiosity, do borrow this book from our church library, and dip into it. You do not have to read right through from start to finish, as each essay stands on its own, though there is certainly a cumulative effect as you gradually get to understand and admire the author more and more as you read.

***Pauline Miller***

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