

MARK'S MESSENGER

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

December 2025



ADVENT A Time to Reflect

Suggested Donation £2 via the Giving Door, in cash or scanning the QR code



ADVENT 2025: 25 DAYS OF ACTION

Advent is a season of waiting, but it is not a passive waiting. It is a time of hopeful expectation, a time when we prepare for the coming of God's kingdom of peace and justice. This year, as we look around at the challenges facing our communities, our nation, and the wider world, we sense that waiting must be active. The birth of Christ calls us not only to hope for change but to embody it, to be people through whom God's light shines in dark places.

That's why our theme this Advent is 25 Days of Action. We are inviting everyone in our church family to explore what it means to wait with purpose, to turn our Advent reflections into small acts of compassion, justice, and solidarity.

We've put together a list of 25 ideas for action. These are not meant to be a checklist or a daily task list, but rather a menu of possibilities. You might choose a few that feel manageable, and perhaps one or two that take you outside your comfort zone. Together, our individual choices can weave a tapestry of hope and generosity across our communities.

Some actions are practical: bringing items for the food bank, donating baby clothes to Baby Basics, or joining the Sandwich Run to share food and conversation with people sleeping rough.

Others involve advocacy: writing to your MP about the two-child benefit cap, learning about the Lift the Ban campaign for people seeking asylum, or taking part in Amnesty International's 'Write for Rights' campaign. Still others are about relationship and presence: inviting a neighbour for Sunday lunch, visiting someone who might find this season difficult, or joining in carol singing at a care home.

Each small act is a candle lit in the darkness. Together, they form a movement of love that points toward the heart of Advent, Emmanuel, God with us. In a world of anxiety, inequality, and conflict, every action for peace, justice, and compassion is a way of saying we are waiting, but we are not

idle. We are preparing the way for the One who brings good news to the poor and sets the captives free. So, as we light the Advent candles this year, may we also light the fire of justice and generosity in our lives. May our waiting be active, our faith courageous, and our love tangible. And may the hope of Christ's coming renew in us the vision of God's kingdom, where peace and righteousness meet, and every person is known as beloved.

At the end of this article, you'll find the full list of 25 Actions for Advent. Choose a few that speak to you, and let's wait together, in action, for the coming of God's kingdom.

Beth Keith, Vicar.

1. Switch one gift this year for a charitable donation instead.
2. Bring items to church for the food bank.
3. Write to your MP about child poverty or universal credit levels.
4. Donate money to the Children's Society at our Christingle Service.
5. Donate a sleeping bag to Ben's Centre or The Archer Project.
6. Join in with the Sandwich Run, giving out food and drink to those sleeping rough.
7. Volunteer with HARC, Homeless and Rootless at Christmas.
8. Read the Sheffield Poverty Truth Commission Report, *Finding the Root Cause*, online or in the copies at the back of church.
9. Donate pre-loved items to ASSIST to furnish accommodation for those seeking asylum.
10. Contact your MP to urge fairer asylum processing times.
11. Find out about Lift the Ban campaign. Consider how you could support this.
12. Find out about Hope at Home. Consider hosting a survivor of slavery.
13. Learn one new thing about the UK asylum system and share it on social media

14. Join a peaceful vigil, protest or prayer walk.
15. Write for Rights. Write a letter with Amnesty International supporting political prisoners.
16. Read a book on liberation theology, poverty or social justice.
17. Invite a neighbour or church member who lives alone for tea or Sunday lunch.
18. Reduce your consumption.
19. Join in or organize a litter pick around your community.
20. Practice 'buy less, give more' this Christmas.
21. donate money to Amnesty International, SAYiT, Hope at Home and USPG at our Christmas services
22. Call or visit someone you know who might find this season difficult.
23. Donate baby and toddler clothing, bedding, toys, books and equipment to Baby Basics.
24. Pray for Peace.
25. Join in with carol singing at a care home.

MESSENGER EDITORIAL TEAM:

Dez Martin, Frances Gray, Margot Fox, Michael Miller, Shan Rush. This issue was edited by Shan.

We welcome comments and suggestions and invite contributions. The next edition will be edited by Michael Miller for publication in February 2026. Items should be submitted to Michael by 11 January for consideration. It should be noted that the Editors cannot guarantee to publish material and wish to point out that items included do not necessarily reflect their views or those of the Parochial Church Council.

When sending photographs for inclusion, please ensure they are sent separately from the article as JPEG's, and are preferably of a high resolution.

CHARITIES WE ARE SUPPORTING OVER CHRISTMAS

Hope at Home – <https://www.hopeathome.org.uk/>

Providing safe homes for survivors of modern slavery by offering a range of innovative accommodation options in collaboration with other organisations.

When survivor of slavery Qadira arrived at her Hope at Home placement, her host met her at the train station with a warm welcome. Since then, she's been settling in brilliantly, attending study classes and a sewing group, enjoying the gym and even cooking samosas for her host's birthday party.

Qadira says she feels safe and supported and is determined to rebuild her independence, one small step at a time.

Her host describes her as "thoughtful and respectful," and the two now share meals and laughter in what feels like a warm and welcoming home.

Every safe home makes stories like Qadira's possible. Our hosts are ordinary people with a spare bedroom and an open heart. We support them every step of the way. Could you host?

USPG – <https://christmas.uspg.org.uk/>

Across Tanzania, mothers are facing pregnancy with both hope and fear. Without treatment, babies have up to a 40% chance of being born HIV-positive. But through the Elimination of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV (eMTCT) programme, led by the Anglican Church of Tanzania, that risk has fallen to less than 0.5%.

Church-run healthcare teams at Mvumi Mission Hospital and Kilimatinde Mission Hospital are providing HIV testing, treatment, and counselling to expectant mothers, ensuring that more children are born free from infection.

This Christmas, your love can help that miracle continue. Mothers who once feared never holding a healthy child again, are now giving birth to HIV-free babies thanks to this programme. Through your support, many mothers receive care, compassion, and the chance to begin anew.

Your gift will help train healthcare workers, fund outreach clinics to remote villages, repair hospital facilities, and provide vital medicines for mothers and newborns.

This Christmas, join us in supporting these two charities.

INTRODUCING SAM & FELICITY



We're Sam and Felicity, and we moved here last November when Felicity joined the chaplaincy team at Sheffield Children's Hospital, where she's now the part-time Deputy Lead Chaplain. Sam works for MHA as Head of Chaplaincy, supporting chaplains in care homes and retirement living across the country.

Before arriving here, we have been in parish ministry in the Liverpool Diocese, and we've worked in communities with adults with learning disabilities in the UK and in the United States where we were visiting clergy in the Episcopal Church. We moved here from Huddersfield where Felicity was a parish priest and Sam was a hospital chaplain.

We love living in Sheffield. Sam grew up here, so we're enjoying rediscovering familiar places through fresh eyes. We're getting to know the Peaks, meeting new people, and chasing after our enthusiastic toddler. We also love cooking food, music, and coffee.

We've loved worshipping at St Mark's over the past few months and appreciate the church's inclusivity and spirituality. We are really looking forward to becoming more involved and getting to know you!

Felicity Cowling-Green

Editor's note – Felicity and Sam have both offered to preside and preach at St Mark's once a term so we look forward to reaping the benefits of their ministry amongst us.

DISCERNING VOCATION



When you come from a clergy family you tend to go down one of two paths. The first is to adopt the occupation of your parents as they have been an inspirational role model. The second is to do an about-turn and to run as far away as possible from any role connected with the church. Up until 12 years ago I was in the latter category. However, in 2013, I was – along with a few others – invited to a seminar on exploring vocation. I turned up not expecting anything, but less than 3 years later I had enrolled on the Foundation Course at Sheffield School of Ministry. In 2019, I became a Licensed Lay Minister (LLM) – or (Lay) Reader. Since then, I have been privileged to join the preaching rota at the 10am Eucharist, and to perform the role of a deacon in that service.

Training as a Reader was extremely time-consuming – the work I submitted over the three years was around 40,000 words. But it was great training and gave me the biblical and pastoral knowledge to approach the role with more confidence. One of my favourite modules was on Christian Ethics, and we had to submit an essay on assisted dying – which has, since then, become a very real issue in Parliament.

It is a tremendous joy to participate in the Eucharist; I find that distributing the bread, or giving a blessing at the rail, is the most touching part of the service for me. I also find myself in the privileged position of being permitted to preach. I often wonder how I could have the audacity to speak to a congregation that is, collectively, more experienced and qualified than I could hope to be. But I was taught well, I use the Lectionary, and I rely on good old-fashioned prayer as I aim to find the right words. It takes me a couple of weeks to prepare, as I like to sit with the readings for a while to let them speak to me. I have been encouraged by individuals brave enough to comment on my sermons – either via email or in person after the service – which has often led to further discussions over coffee.

When licensed, I thought that would be the end of any further formal training. However, a couple of years ago I wondered if I should go deeper. Chats with Sue Hammersley, and then Beth, led to discussions with the Diocesan Director of Ordinands. This culminated in my beginning study at the college of St Hild – based in Mirfield, though I study in Sheffield at their Crookes centre.

I am on a pilot 2-year course called *The Elizabeth Pathway*, amusingly described as a course for ‘seasoned saints’, in other words those between the ages of 55 and 65. In year one I am studying alongside the discernment process for ordination. If selected (and as I write the process is incomplete), then I would take year two, leading to ordination as a Distinctive Deacon in 2027. If not selected then that is fine, as I am discerning if ordination is appropriate.

The training at St Hild is outstanding, and it is refreshing for my theology to be challenged by those with alternative church traditions. Just as we at St Mark’s can worship and commune together despite undoubted disagreements on a range of issues, so I can worship, study and commune with evangelicals, charismatics, Anglo-Catholics and liberal Catholics, and regard them all as fellow travellers. And they are teaching me a lot about personal and daily Christian discipline.

If this article has stirred anything about vocation, I would be only too pleased to discuss and share further. Whilst I am wary of the term ‘discerning a call,’ as it has overtones of having a hotline to the Almighty, I can certainly look back over my Christian journey and see where God has held me close.

Jonathan Williamson

UPDATE from LIZZIE ILSLEY

It was so lovely to bump into Shan at Leah's installation at Sheffield Cathedral in September – and she encouraged me to write to let you know what I'm up to now.

I was ordained deacon in July 2024 and then priested at Sheffield Cathedral in July 2025. I'm currently serving my curacy in Rotherham – based at Rotherham Minster and the Chapel on the Bridge but also serving St Paul's Church in Masbrough. I'm one of a team of 5 clergy – one of whom is Louise Castle who I remember doing a placement at St Mark's – it's lovely to have that continuity - and we share an office together!



Throughout my training and first year of curacy as deacon I was self-supporting – continuing to work part time as a Speech and Language Therapist based up the road from Rotherham Minster at Rotherham Hospital, with a team I have worked with for nearly 20 years, and who have actively supported me all the way through discernment and vicar school. Towards the beginning of this year, I started feeling the nudge to lay down working for the NHS – which was quite a wrench – it was a bit like leaving a church! I now find myself in full time stipendiary curacy here in Rotherham.

You may know that Rotherham Minster is being developed as a Resourcing Church – and my stipend comes from funding for this – and is contingent on my becoming a 'planting curate' - planting or grafting out with a team from the Minster and possibly St Paul's at some point in the next couple of years – somewhere in Rotherham – we're not sure yet. My husband Jon and I have committed to moving to Rotherham in 2028 – we're still living in Sheffield at the moment.

Coming from a liberal Catholic tradition, and having been nurtured in faith at St Mark's as an adult, I have to admit the words 'Resourcing Church', – even

‘planting out’ would have sent me running a mile not that long ago – and if you had told me I’d be a planting curate when I started theological college, I would have laughed, a lot. The language of church planting can carry quite a lot of baggage – for me at least! What’s been exciting, though, is to be encouraged to think about what a resourcing church, a church plant and church growth might look like from a liberal Catholic or ‘central’ perspective – or at least something other than an HTB, conservative ‘big church plant and growth’ model – and to really consider carefully what serving the needs of the community in where we are looks like – which will be different everywhere. I’ve also been encouraged to use my experience at St Mark’s in this next stage. I’m still not entirely sure where all this will take us in the next few years – but it feels like the right place to be and is very exciting.

Meanwhile, for now, I’m really enjoying my curacy. It’s a bit of a cliché – but no day is the same. In the week, Rotherham Minster is open for all who wish to come. The Minster holds space for Rotherham Minster Connections, a project which includes a ‘Social Supermarket.’ This is a bit like a foodbank – but much more – people who find themselves struggling to make ends meet can become members of the supermarket and pay three pounds a week for three months to shop. They also have access to social and creative activities in the Minster itself, and help with whatever circumstance brought them to the point where they are. There is space here too for prayer and contemplation, although no pressure whatsoever to join that. Chaplaincy in this space is a privilege – and being able to chat with people from all walks of life is genuinely humbling – and fascinating. There’s an informal worshipping community that has grown out of Rotherham Connections – the ‘Saturday Gathering.’

Serving four worshipping communities: St Paul’s, The Chapel on the Bridge, The Minster and the Saturday Gathering – which often overlap – with varying – often wildly different – histories, traditions, language and theology is also life giving – and so interesting. It’s been a steep learning curve for me as someone who likes to be able to label and box in what she finds! I was reminded again recently that we can’t pin God or the Spirit down.

Jon and I are so grateful for the friendship, community and encouragement from St Mark’s over the years – I don’t think I’d be in the place I find myself in without that – and it’s been exciting to see how things are growing and developing with you all. Do drop by if you ever find yourself in Rotherham – it would be lovely to see you.

With love, Lizzie.

MISFITS AND REPROBATES

I was sitting with the choir at St Mark's one Sunday morning when I spotted two friends of mine, a married couple, coming into the church. They normally go to another church with somewhat different theological ideas to St Mark's, so I wondered why they had suddenly turned up here. After the service I asked them and was told that a major problem had arisen between them and their vicar, and they had in effect been barred from attending their church for the time being, until it was sorted out. It was all resolved in the end, but it took a little time.

One of them told me that they had been thinking about which other church they could attend in the meanwhile and had chosen St Mark's as "you welcome misfits and reprobates." Doubtless a reference to that fact that when we say, "All are welcome," we do genuinely try to make everyone welcome, rather than silently adding "... unless you're gay, or approve of women priests, or have difficulty with accepting all scripture as being the literal word of God."

I rather liked the idea that I might be a misfit and a reprobate. After all, Jesus himself was regarded as such by the religious authorities of his time, and went about welcoming, affirming and encouraging a whole load of other misfits, such as tax collectors, prostitutes, Samaritans, Romans, the poor and destitute, lepers, and people with other illnesses which were seen as a reason for excluding them from mainstream society.

We are therefore in good company, but we still need to stand up for people who might be regarded by some as misfits and reprobates in our own communities: asylum seekers, immigrants, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus, homeless people, those living on benefits and having to use food banks, and so on. People whom some of our own religious and political leaders still want to try to ignore, exclude and blame.

What does the Lord require of you? To do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God.

When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you.

Love your neighbour as yourself.

As I write this, some members of far-right organisations are attempting to stoke division and incite hatred for asylum seekers and immigrants. Some of these far-right activists are calling for the country to return to Christian values. Some have indicated a desire to abolish mosques and send Muslims and others out

of the country. Are these people really displaying Christian values with their rhetoric and their sometimes-violent actions? Are they acting justly, loving mercy and showing humility or is their idea of a Christian society one with only white faces, church bells ringing on a Sunday morning, attending school nativity plays, and a return to Britain being Great, as it once was in the days of Empire, according to them? Days when we spread civilisation across the globe to people in need of enlightenment, they would maintain. Rather conveniently ignoring the fact that these people already had very cultured civilisations of their own, which we wrecked, and then stole their resources and sold the people into slavery. And then followed it up by sowing the seeds of numerous future conflicts by drawing lines on maps which had no regard for ethnic, cultural and religious groups occupying the region, effectively disrupting the communities established there.

That is not my idea of a Britain which is Great. To me, a great country should be one in which those who themselves seek to be great by pursuing political power become the least, the servants of all. A great country is one in which everyone is regarded equally and treated fairly, regardless of status, race, creed, political persuasion or sexual orientation.

Not everyone on the right or far right expresses explicitly racist views, but there are plenty who want to see Britain leave the European Convention on Human Rights, and to abolish diversity, equality and inclusion rules set out in the 2010 Equalities Act. Some have outlined policies to stop migrants being able to claim indefinite leave to remain in the country and increasing the National Insurance rate to 20% for migrants. I would see all this as the start of a slippery slope.

Should members of the far right ever succeed in wielding power in Britain and start a programme of legalised discrimination, it will be up to us to oppose them, to be seen as fools for Christ, misfits in the society that they want to create, by speaking up and promoting ideals of inclusion and acceptance for all.

Andrew Sanderson

PS: There is currently a Conservative Private Members' Bill going through Parliament – the Immigration and Visas Bill – which, amongst other things, will allow for the deportation of people in this country who have been here for years with indefinite leave to remain, if they have ever claimed benefits, or if their income drops below a certain (quite high ...) level, or for a plethora of other reasons. This underlines the importance of resisting such measures.

CARING FOR CREATION



Recently the Environment Group reviewed the various themed worship opportunities and services that we enjoyed this year and were delighted with the exposure to creation care, the celebration of its wonders, the warnings about extractionist ideologies, and the various practical ways in which we can make more positive choices and encourage others to do so too.

During the Season of Creation alone, the activities included:

- ❑ 2 climate and nature themed services, one of which was all age
- ❑ a climate – themed liturgy
- ❑ a conference on more sustainable economics
- ❑ promotion of Fair-Trade Fortnight with a display, a stall selling FT products, FT refreshments after the morning service, and a petition to highlight the plight of tea farmers
- ❑ display boards on Eco Church and what St Mark's is doing towards Net Zero at the back of church and available for our Heritage Open Days
- ❑ a visit from Broomhill Infants including a tour of our nature activities on the Green
- ❑ apple picking on the Green and the sharing of garden apples and home made jams
- ❑ a splendid harvest service adorned with a stunning array of home grown and local flora.

Thank you to everyone involved in planning, leading and delivering these activities.

Margaret Ainger

A HOLY DEATH

As in life, God; so in death, God.

'Christians in our own time are unfamiliar with the ancient habit of meditating upon our death, yet Covid may be teaching us to walk with death more closely and consciously than many in the rich North have had to do for decades.'

These words from Nicola Slee's book *Abba Amma*, spoke profoundly to me and sent me back to some jottings I had made last year about a holy death. I have expanded these a little, and while they don't indulge in some of the more frightful medieval ideas (though I guess the dance of death might well actually be some sort of a dance with death for many of us – remembering, for instance, that I feel sure I danced with death at least twice last year), I hope that rather than being morbid, what follows might be a gentle and trusting way of preparation for what lies ahead; of which I become more aware as I get older.

Bona Mors

As in life, God;
so, in death, God.

May I have a good death, a holy death.
Where there is pain, may I bear it with grace.
Where there is sorrow, may I bear it with hope.
Where there is need for forgiveness, may I seek it in truth.
Where there is darkness, may I know that darkness is not dark with you;
but may I rather see the light that hides, reveals and transfigures.

Into your hands, O God, I commend my spirit.
You have loved me from the beginning,
love me to the end,
and beyond the end,
Into closer life and love with you.
Into your hands, O God, I commend my spirit.

A simple examen of life.

Ask these two simple questions both about your life now and your overall life:

- what has taken me nearer to God?
- what has taken me away from God?

Give thanks to God for everything and everyone that has connected you with God.

Ask God's pardon for the barriers and back-turnings that have concealed God from you.

Praise and thanksgiving

Night is drawing nigh –
For all that has been – thanks!
To all that shall be – Yes!

Dag Hammarskjold

Hope

All my hope on God is founded;
God doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance God guideth,
Only God and only true.
God unknown,
God alone,
Calls my heart to be God's own.

Joachim Neander

Holding of those near and dear

Look with love, O God,
on those whom I have loved
and all who have loved me.
Hold them in your arms,
and grant that they may not grieve
as others do who have no hope,
but may know the consolation of your love.

Commendation of self

The eternal God is our refuge,
and underneath are the everlasting arms.

Soul of Christ sanctify me.
Body of Christ save me.
Blood of Christ inebriate me.
Water from the side of Christ wash me.
Passion of Christ strengthen me.
O good Jesus hear me.
Within your wounds hide me.
Suffer me not to be separated from you.
In the hour of my death call me,
and bid me come to you,
that with your saints
I may praise you for ever and ever.
Amen.

Into your hands, O God, I commend my spirit.
Keep me as the apple of your eye.
Hide me under the shadow of your wings.
Into your hands, O God, I commend my spirit.

As in life, God; so in death, God.
Amen.

John Schofield

"Racism: A Modern Reflection on an Old Evil"

When the Nazis came for the Communists, I remained silent.

Then they came for the Socialists, and I remained silent.

Then for the Democrats, and I remained silent.

Then they came for me ... and there was no one left to speak out.

Martin Niemöller

Racism, in its classic sense, is the belief that one race is inherently superior to another, and that this superiority grants one group the right to dominate or exclude others. It is not merely a personal prejudice; it is a system that distributes power and privilege unequally. From the slave ships of the empire to the walls of modern borders, racism has been used to justify exploitation and division across centuries.

Racism often arises from fear and ignorance, but it is also deliberately cultivated for political and economic gain. When societies face hardship, unemployment, austerity, or social change, those in power often look for scapegoats. It is easier to blame someone different than to challenge injustice itself. Thus, racism becomes a convenient tool for the powerful: it divides the working class, weakens solidarity, and hides the real roots of inequality.

In contemporary Britain, these old patterns have returned with a modern face. Decades of austerity, insecure work, and a collapsing welfare system have created a fertile ground for right-wing populism. Parties such as the Reform Party, UKIP, and figures like Tommy Robinson have built their appeal on resentment. They claim to defend 'ordinary people', yet their speeches and campaigns fuel hostility towards refugees, migrants, people of colour, and the LGBT+ community, particularly LGBT+ refugees who flee persecution for simply being who they are.

Their rhetoric paints multiculturalism as a threat to 'British values', when in truth Britain's greatness has always come from diversity: from the Caribbean nurses who rebuilt the NHS, to the South Asian workers who powered its factories, and the countless migrants who care for Britain's elderly and sick today. Every wave of migration has enriched this country's culture, economy, and humanity.

Yet racism continues to shape daily life. Refugees are dehumanised as 'invaders' and forced into unsafe, overcrowded housing. Many of them, women, LGBT+ people, and survivors of torture, live in constant fear, facing both bureaucratic cruelty and public hostility. Black and Asian Britons still experience higher levels of unemployment, police profiling, and discrimination in housing and education. Migrant workers who perform essential labour are depicted as burdens rather than

contributors. Racism, though often disguised in polite language, still defines who belongs and who does not.

The damage racism inflicts on society is profound. It poisons public debate, destroys social trust, and encourages violence. When hatred is tolerated, everyone becomes less free. Niemöller's warning reminds us that silence in the face of injustice is never neutral, it is an act of surrender. If we fail to defend others, no one will be left to defend us.



The recent surge in far-right extremism in Britain shows how fragile tolerance can be. Online networks spread racist conspiracy theories; street groups target hotels housing asylum seekers; and politicians borrow the language of hate for electoral gain. What begins with slogans often ends with attacks, arson at refugee shelters, harassment of Muslims, abuse of LGBT+ people, and assaults on Black Britons. Such violence does not appear from nowhere; it grows from the soil of political cynicism and public indifference.

To resist racism, we need more than condemnation. We need education, empathy, and action. Schools should teach not just tolerance but also the history of empire, slavery, and migration, the real story of how Britain became what it is. The media must be held accountable for fuelling fear. Trade unions, community groups, and faith organisations must stand together to defend every resident, regardless of race, nationality, gender, or sexuality. When people meet and work together, prejudice loses its power.

Fighting racism also means challenging inequality itself. As long as wealth and power remain concentrated in a few hands, the temptation to divide people by race or origin will persist. Social justice, fair wages, secure housing, and equality before the law, is the strongest antidote to hatred. Refugees and migrants should not be treated as temporary guests but as full members of our shared community.

In today's Britain, we face the same moral test Niemöller described: to stay silent or to speak out. Every time we ignore racist abuse, laugh at a prejudiced joke, or accept policies that punish the vulnerable, we inch closer to that final silence, the moment when no one is left to stand for justice.

Racism is not destiny; it is a choice, made by societies and individuals alike. And as Jesus Christ said, "*Love your neighbour as yourself.*" In those few words lies the ultimate rejection of racism, and the promise of a humanity equal in dignity, bound by compassion, and free from fear.

Manuchehr

SABBATICAL NEWS



My first service at St Mark's was Sunday, 11 November 2018, the hundredth anniversary of the end of the First World War. I'd been involved in music since I was a child, but since leaving university in the mid 1990s, I'd played the organ on only a handful of occasions and had had limited involvement in church music, although I had sung regularly at Sheffield Cathedral where my sons had been choristers. Starting at St Mark's when I did was something of a baptism of fire, but luckily everyone kept an eye out for me and kindly caught the balls I was letting drop.

The Director of Music's role is a lot of fun, but I'm ready for a break. The PCC have kindly allowed me a sabbatical for the first four months of 2026. I plan to use it to explore some parts of Europe that I've not visited. Zeena (my wife) is a teacher and can't take the same time off, so for some of my travels I'll be on my own.

In January, I plan to head to Andalusia for 2 or 3 weeks, and to visit Seville, Cordoba, Granada and the Sierra Nevada. The guidebooks all say what you can do there from February to December, so I'm expecting January to be very quiet.

In the February half term, Zeena and I will be in London, seeing shows, visiting galleries, dining out and generally living the good life.

In March, I'll take off again on my own, although I've not decided exactly where I'm going yet. I'd thought of visiting the saunas of Finland, but it still looks extremely cold there. I'm also planning to travel overland, and Finland is 3 days each way, so it may be a retirement rather than a sabbatical project. Instead, I may head for the opera houses of Europe.

At Easter, Zeena and I are heading to Ireland. I've never been and am looking forward to an extended visit there.

I'm very grateful to Eleanor Jarvis for running the music in my absence, and to the PCC for allowing me the time off. I expect to come back refreshed and ready for many more years of happy music making.

***David Willington,
Director of Music***

INTRODUCING ELEANOR



Hello St Mark's!

My name is Eleanor Jarvis, and I have the pleasure of serving as Assistant Director of Music here at St Mark's. Many of you may have already seen me around – conducting during Sunday morning services, singing in the choir, or occasionally playing the organ. Although I've been involved in various ways over the past few years, it's wonderful to now be officially part of the St Mark's music team.

As many of you know, I now lead St Mark's Songbirds, our lovely children's choir, and during David's sabbatical, I'll also be overseeing the wider musical ministry. I thought this would be a great opportunity to introduce myself properly and share a little about myself, my background and work.

I enjoy a varied career as a freelance musician in Sheffield – working as a choral conductor, musical director, and educator across the city. Alongside my role at St Mark's, I am the Director of Music for Steel City Choristers, who now rehearse here on Monday and Friday evenings. I am also a Music Tutor with Sheffield Music Hub, where I teach vocal studies and direct Youth Voices, the Hub's choir for children in Y6-Y9.

Over the years, I've been fortunate to conduct services and performances in some remarkable venues, including St Paul's Cathedral (London), Berlin Cathedral, Thomaskirche (Leipzig), and Winchester Cathedral. I've also had the privilege of working on major choral and operatic projects such as Bach's St Matthew Passion, Jonathan Dove's *The Monster in the Maze*, and Bizet's *Carmen*. Each of these experiences has deepened my love for choral music and reinforced the importance of community singing – something that lies at the heart of music-making at St Mark's.

In 2022, I graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Music from the University of Manchester, where I specialised in vocal studies and conducting under the guidance of Kathryn Rudge and Robert Guy. During my time there, I had the opportunity to work with a range of ensembles, including the Hallé Ancoats Community Choir, NEW Voices, Meraki Choir, The Lindow Singers, Crosby Capriol Singers, Semitone Singers, and Blackpool Symphony Orchestra.

I am currently continuing my studies with a Postgraduate Diploma in Music Education and Conducting at the Royal Northern College of Music, where I have also recently been appointed Assistant Musical Director of the RNCM Community Opera. I was honoured to be selected as an Emerging Leader with the Royal School of Church Music for 2024–2025 and have taken part in conducting masterclasses with the RNCM, the Royal Philharmonic Society, the Cardiff International Academy of Conducting, and Musicfest Aberystwyth.

Choral singing has always been at the heart of my musical journey. I've sung with choirs such as Sheffield Cathedral Choir, St John's Church Choir Ranmoor, Ad Solem, The Cosmo Singers, and the University of Manchester Chorus. I'm continuing my vocal studies here in Sheffield with Vivien Pike, and in my spare time, you might catch me practising the organ at St Mark's (please excuse any wrong notes if you do!).

When I'm not doing something musical, you'll probably find me relaxing in one of Sheffield's many cafés with a good cup of coffee and a slice of cake, or enjoying the outdoors – most likely swimming in one of our local reservoirs!

I'm very excited about this chapter in the musical life of St Mark's – working with the wonderful Songbirds, supporting the choir, and helping to sustain our vibrant tradition of music and worship while David is away. Music at St Mark's has such a rich and welcoming spirit, and I feel truly privileged to be part of it.

Eleanor Jarvis

STEEL CITY CHORISTERS AT ST MARK'S



Steel City Choristers at the Brandenburg Gate, Berlin

We are really grateful to Beth for inviting Steel City Choristers to start rehearsing at St Mark's this year. We feel there is a really strong fit between our two organisations in terms of our inclusive approach and our love of choral singing. All the various rooms and of course the fantastic St Mark's organ suit us really well, and the move has also helped deepen our relationship with the St Mark's choir. You may know that David Willington has sung with us since we began, and our Director of Music, Eleanor Jarvis, will be covering for him while he is away on sabbatical next year.

Steel City Choristers started life as a necessary stop-gap measure to keep a strong community of children and adults singing together following the unexpected and unexplained closure of Sheffield Cathedral choir in 2020. We hadn't necessarily anticipated remaining independent forever, but the cathedral has now developed its own plans for music - and meanwhile we have established as a charity with a mission to inspire and train children to sing, and to serve local churches and other communities with cathedral-quality choral

music. Five years on we are flourishing, with plenty of singers and bookings from local churches well into 2027.

We are unusual as a choir because although we lead worship in churches we are an independent charity with no religious objectives, leaving people to be responsible for their own spiritual journeys. The boundaries between music and faith, sacred and secular, are porous for us. We know that choral music can have a transcendent and transformational quality wherever it is heard, and so we sing in secular venues as well as in churches. One highlight this year was singing at A Night at the Musicals at the Lyceum Theatre, sharing the stage with dancers and West End stars, on what happened to be our 150th performance.

Last academic year was a huge one for us. We seized as many opportunities as we could squeeze into our diary. These included an Evensong at St Paul's Cathedral, a five-day residence at Winchester Cathedral and our first international tour to Germany. (you might like to watch this short [5 minute video of our trip to Berlin and Leipzig](#)).

This was on top of continuing to serve a wide range of local churches and other communities who wouldn't otherwise have access to cathedral-quality choral music. In total, we sang 54 performances for 33 host communities over the year, including services at a whole variety of churches such as Mount Tabor Methodist church Parson Cross, St Andrew's URC, St Swithun's on the Manor, All Saints Arksey and All Saints Aston.

This wide and varied range of activity shows how by being released out into the community, the ancient English choral tradition has been given a new life and energy in Steel City Choristers. Instead of being a choir owned by and serving one institution, we have developed a community of children, parents, singers, trustees and supporters with a sense of ownership over our operation and funding. We serve a wide range of churches and other communities across the region and have the agility to be creative and responsive in the way we pursue opportunities.

As we celebrate our 5th birthday this year we are taking stock and considering how to put our organisation onto a firm foundation for the longer term future. A key part of this will be reducing our reliance on grant funding which we know we can't take for granted into the future. We are aiming to diversify our income

streams by raising more recurring donations from individuals – please consider [donating](#) if you feel able to. We are also developing community fundraising projects such as the sale of Christmas cards – we started with a lovely card of us singing outside the Winter Garden, and this year we used the Lyceum Theatre as our backdrop. You can buy our cards on our [website shop](#) and we will bring them for you to collect at church on Sunday.



Christmas Card showing the Steel City Choristers outside the Lyceum Theatre

We will also be putting on a party as a fundraiser to celebrate our 5th birthday in the New Year. We would love you to join us for an evening of music, food, speeches and dancing at The Victoria, Neepsend, on Friday 23rd January 2026. Tickets will be on sale soon but please consider yourself invited and save the date!

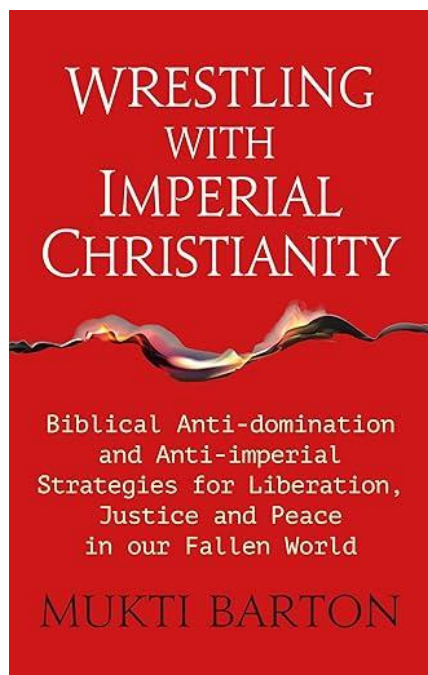
We give children from Y2 to Y13 an amazing musical education! We rehearse twice a week on Mondays and Fridays and perform around 40 times a year. Younger children usually join us as Juniors and only rehearse once a week on Mondays and perform only once or twice a term. If you know a child who loves to sing and would be interested in joining us, please email enquiries@steelcitychoristers.org.uk to arrange a visit and an informal audition.

Kate Caroe



BOOK REVIEW:

WRESTLING WITH IMPERIAL CHRISTIANITY by Mukti Barton¹



Dr Mukti Barton describes herself as an 'Indian Bengali Christian woman' who came to live in England in 1975 with her 'white English husband'. From then on, she recounts how, on a regular basis, she found herself, 'at the receiving end of racism, sexism, and classicism', which she attributes to the fact that 'India was colonised for two hundred years by the British empire'. This had, in part, resulted in a culture in the UK, 'both religious and secular' that had made her feel excluded. She then sets out to explain why she sees that culture as, in large part, being the result of the influence that an imperial form of Christianity has had on shaping the British cultural landscape. Essentially, her view is that it has

only been since the early 1960s, when, she argues, there was a paradigm shift in the ways of doing theology by 'reading the Bible from the view of the powerless', that Christianity has been able to break free from its former colonial intellectual and cultural linages, to become a liberating movement for change and the human emancipation from oppressive and sometimes tyrannical regimes.

As such, she is praiseworthy of Liberation Theology, stating that *A Theology of Liberation*, written by Gustavo Gutierrez and published in 1971, is a book that exemplifies this paradigm shift. Indeed, she states that: 'It is exhibiting a method of reading our scripture for liberation, which I have been using for nearly forty years'. She has also been influenced by Black Liberation Theology and what she describes as 'womanist' perspectives on theology, and defines her purpose as follows: 'In this book I will utilize this same liberation hermeneutic to free ourselves from the Western imperial, Euro-American, dominant, mainstream, traditional hegemonic Christianity'.

What makes this book an original and important study is the way that Dr Barton then relates her radical reading of the Bible, underpinned by her affinity for liberation theologies, to events, such as the murder of George Floyd at the hands of police in the USA in May 2020, which she attributes to the increasingly violent influence of Western imperialism which, in many cases, she argues are then falsely 'justified' by Western interpretations of the Bible.

The book is structured as a series of studies on writings in the Old and New Testaments that Dr Barton seeks to reinterpret along the lines of the paradigm shift that we have been exploring.

She has an impressive knowledge of the Bible and applies that knowledge in ways that relate to the contemporary realities that she is concerned with addressing: racial discrimination, sexual discrimination, social inequalities, abuses of power and so forth. This is not, therefore, a book of purely 'academic' relevance, though it is a work of academic depth; rather, it is also a work of theo-political relevance in a world where many social and political injustices need to be called out and resolved.

I found the book to be a stimulating, erudite and accessible read, and was particularly impressed by Dr Barton's interpretation of writers such as Dr Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi, the former portrayed as being a victim of American imperialism and the latter as a victim of British imperialism. As she puts it: 'It is as true today as it was in the biblical world, that as soon as the mammonic tree produces its fruit (vilification and oppression of an innocent human being) the tree of life/wisdom calls that person to fight Mammon'. This is a view that captures some of the wisdom of both King and Gandhi and is as true today as it was when they fought injustice and oppression.

Joe Forde²

¹Darton: Longman + Todd, 2025

²Dr Joseph Forde is author for *Before and Beyond the Big Society: John Milbank and the Church of England's Approach to Welfare* (James Clarke & Co. 2022) and Co-editor (with Terry Drummond) of *Celebrating Forty Years of Faith in the City* (Sacristy Press, 2025).

WHO'S WHO

Interim Operations Coordinator	Rachael Hand	office@stmarkssheffield.co.uk
Church Office		0114 266 3613 or 07483 424206
Vicar	Revd. Dr Beth Keith	beth@stmarkssheffield.co.uk
Assistant Priest & Pastoral Care Lead	Revd. Shan Rush	shan@stmarkssheffield.co.uk
Associate Priest Theologian	Revd Dr Ian Wallis	ian@stmarkssheffield.co.uk
Childrens & Families Worker	Hannah Jones	childrensworker@stmarksheffield.co.uk
Churchwarden	Dilys Noble	dilysnoble@hotmail.co.uk
Director of Music	David Willington	music@stmarkssheffield.co.uk
Caretaker	Tim Moore	caretaker@stmarkssheffield.co.uk
Readers	Anne Padget	befreeuk@hotmail.com
	Jonathan Williamson	office@stmarkssheffield.co.uk
Car park enquiries		carparkingstmarks@gmail.com
Honorary Staff	Rev. Dr. Michael Bayley	Mjbayley36@gmail.com
	Rev. Dr. Mark Newitt	Mark.newitt@gmail.com
Lunch club	Jean Baxter	Jean_baxter5@hotmail.com
Treasurer	David Armstrong	david.treasurer3@gmail.com
Library Team	Joe Forde	joe.forde@tiscali.co.uk
	Carole Forde	
Gift Aid Secretary	Tom Cottrell	tjcottrell@hotmail.co.uk
Flowers	Mary-Jane Ryder	
Messenger Editors	Frances Gray	grayfrances71@gmail.com
	Michael Miller & Shan Rush	mgm@mm1728pm.plus.com
Safeguarding Team:		
Parish Safeguarding Officer	Duncan Lennox	07422575765
Safeguarding Administrator	Hannah Jones	safeguarding.stmarkssheffield@gmail.com
Domestic Abuse Officer	Cath Williamson	
Sheffield Diocese Safeguarding		www.sheffield.anglican.org/safeguarding

CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS WITH ST MARK'S CHURCH

30 November, 4pm
Christingle.

14 December, 6pm
Big Queer Carols
An inclusive and joyful carol service.

21 December, 6pm
A Carol Service of traditional and contemporary carols
and readings with St Mark's Choir & Steel City Choristers.

Christmas Eve 4.30pm
Nativity Service with hot chocolate from 4pm.

Christmas Eve 11.30pm
Candlelit service of carols, reflection,
prayer, and Communion.

Christmas Day
* 8am BCP Communion
* 10am Festive All Age Communion Service.
* also online via Zoom.

**St Mark's is an inclusive church offering
worship and hospitality where all are welcome**

