

SPOTLIGHT

Offington Park Methodist Church Magazine



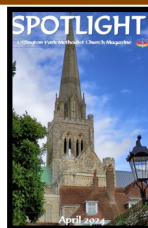
April 2024

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Cover Picture - Chichester Cathedral

Originally founded as a Norman church in 1075 by St. Richard of Chichester, Chichester cathedral has undergone numerous renovations and expansions to become today's awe-inspiring masterpiece.



One of the most striking features is the 15th Century spire, which towers over the city at a height of 269 feet. It is one of the tallest church spires in the UK. The spire draws visitors from far and wide to marvel at its beauty and enjoy panoramic views of the surrounding countryside from the top.

The interior is adorned with stunning stained glass windows, delicate vaulted ceilings, and ornate stone carvings, each with a story to tell. Chichester Cathedral is not merely a place of worship, it is a living testament to the enduring spirit of community and heritage - an unforgettable journey through history and spirituality that inspires and uplifts all who pass through this cherished jewel of sacred architecture.

Dear Friends,



I do hope you were able to come to some or all of the Easter services provided this year. My thanks to all those who contributed in any way to Holy Week. It is a week that is becoming less observed by general society but that somehow makes it all the more special for those who confess to follow Jesus to ensure that the message continues to be upheld.

A colleague relayed at a meeting the other day that they had been told, 'we don't use the word sin in church anymore.' What a very strange idea, being as we say it on a daily basis if we recite the Lord's Prayer, and in the modern version the word trespasses is replaced with the word sin.

I am reliably informed that a more up-to-date term for admitting being in the wrong is 'my bad'. In the Lent study book we have been following this year Sarah Mullally, the Bishop of London, quotes a prayer of John Wesley. I have replaced the word sin with 'our bad'.

I encourage you to read it through using both terms. I would enjoy hearing your comments.

Forgive them all, O Lord:

*Our bad of omission and our bad of commission;
Our bad of our youth and our bad of our riper years;
Our bad of our souls and our bad of our bodies.
Our bad secrets and our more open bad.
Our bad of ignorance and surprise,
And our more deliberate and presumptuous bad.
The bad we have done to please ourselves
And the bad we have done to please others;
Our bad we know and remember and our bad we have forgotten;
Our bad we have striven to hide from others
And our bad by which we have made others offend;
Forgive them, O Lord, forgive them all for his sake,
Who died for our bad and rose for our justification,
And now stands at thy right hand to make intercession for us,
Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Whichever word you use, our continuing faith journey relies on us owning up when we get it wrong / sin / 'our bad' and accept the forgiveness and love of our Saviour.

With every blessing,

Dawn

CHURCH FAMILY NEWS



GOLDEN WEDDING

Joy & Graham F
(married at Offington Park!)

SIGNIFICANT BIRTHDAY

Roy C



With very best wishes for your special days!

OFFERTORIES

Month	Cash & Envelopes	Standing Orders
February	£294.00	£5,860



Coffee Morning and Box Opening in aid of Action for Children

Saturday 13 April
10:00am - 12:00pm

Network stall, plus plants and cakes to buy.
Please support this worthwhile charity.

Lionel B

ENGLISH IS WEIRD.

If lawyers can be disbarred, can electricians be delighted, musicians be denoted, cowboys be deranged, models be deposed, and dry cleaners be depressed?

CHRISTIANITY AROUND THE WORLD



Niger is a predominantly Muslim country in West Africa. Christianity in Niger does have a notable presence, particularly in urban areas and among certain ethnic groups, but still represents a minority religion.

Christianity arrived in Niger via French missionaries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These missionaries established churches and schools, primarily in urban areas, and began to spread the Christian faith among the local population.

The Catholic Church has a significant presence, particularly in the capital city of Niamey and other urban centres, and is one of the largest Christian denominations in Niger. Protestant and Evangelical churches, as well as other smaller denominations and independent churches also exist in Niger, catering to different linguistic, cultural, and theological preferences.

The Christian community in Niger is diverse, consisting of both indigenous Nigeriens and expatriates from other countries. Christians in Niger come from various ethnic backgrounds, including Hausa, Zarma-Songhai, Tuareg, and Fulani.

The country's predominantly Muslim population and the influence of Islamic traditions and customs pose challenges for Christians, particularly in terms of social acceptance and religious freedom. Additionally, poverty, underdevelopment, and political instability in Niger can affect the ability of Christian communities to practice their faith freely and to access resources and support for their religious activities. But, despite the challenges, interfaith relations between Christians and Muslims in Niger have generally been peaceful, with instances of cooperation and mutual respect. Both religious communities often coexist harmoniously, sharing common cultural practices and traditions. Interfaith dialogue and collaboration between Christian and Muslim leaders and organizations are also promoted to foster understanding and tolerance among different religious groups in the country.

ROBERT LOWRY

**Up from the grave he arose
With a mighty triumph o'er his foes
He arose a victor from the dark domain
And he lives for ever with his saints to reign
He arose! He arose! Alleluia, Christ arose!**



Robert Lowry was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1826. He was the son of Crozier Lowry, an immigrant from Northern Ireland. Lowry underwent an experience of religious conversion at the age of 17 and as a result left his parents' church, and joined the First Baptist Church of Philadelphia. Here he worked enthusiastically as a Sunday School teacher and chorister.

By the age of 22, pursuing a life of work in the Christian ministry, Lowry was already building a reputation both as a preacher and hymn-writer, and he displayed his talents by organizing the college choir and teaching music to his fellow-students. Six years later, he graduated with the highest honours, and that same year was both ordained into the Baptist ministry and married to Anna Rhees Loxley.

Lowry began his ministry in 1854, at the First Baptist church, West Chester, PA, moving to the Bloomingdale Baptist church in New York some four years later, and after two years there to the Hanson Place Baptist church, Brooklyn.

Although he considered preaching as his principal vocation, Lowry continued to write hymns and compose music. In 1864 he wrote and composed what became perhaps his best-known hymn, "Shall we gather at the river", during a heatwave which claimed many lives. Almost overcome by the heat, he suddenly envisaged the passage in Revelation 22: "And he showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb".

After eight years at Hanson Place, in 1869, Lowry became pastor of the new Lewisburg Baptist church and Professor of Rhetoric at Lewisburg university. Amid his various duties, Lowry continued to write hymns



and compose tunes to existing words. In 1872 he wrote the tune to the hymn, "I need thee every hour" and in 1874 wrote the words and music for "Christ Arose!" His ear for dramatic effect is exemplified in this hymn with the contrast between the solemn verses and the exultant chorus proclaiming the resurrection.

In 1875 Lowry was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity by Lewisburg. In that year he decided to relinquish his professorship, and take up the pastorate at the Park Avenue Church in Plainfield, New Jersey. That same year he provided the music to Fanny Crosby's hymn, "All the way my Saviour leads me". Lowry and Crosby collaborated on many hymns like this.

In 1880, suffering from deteriorating health and increasing deafness, Lowry took a break from his pastoral duties at Plainfield and visited Europe. Five years later, back in the USA and feeling the need for a longer rest, he resigned his ministry. After travels in the south and west of the country, and in Mexico, he returned to Plainfield much refreshed, and resumed his pastoral work.

In 1890, Lowry's wife Anna died and two years later at the age of 64 he married Mary Jane Runyon. Lowry continued to live and work until his death in Plainfield, on November 25, 1899. He is buried at Hillside Cemetery in Plainfield and in 1911, twelve years after his death, a memorial stone was unveiled at the Park Avenue Baptist Church there.

During his life, Lowry wrote over 500 hymn tunes, his first at just 21. He is one of the earliest hymnwriters to supply both lyrics and music.

Lowry was once asked to explain his methods of composition. He said, "I have no method. Sometimes the music comes and the words follow, fitted insensibly to the melody. When anything good, whether words or music, strikes me, I jot it down, using anything to hand. My brain is a sort of spinning machine, I think, for there is music running through it all the time. The tunes of nearly all my hymns have been completed on paper rather than an instrument. Frequently the words of the hymn and the music have been written at the same time."

A CLOSER LOOK AT...GOMER

*a prostitute who rejected a loving husband
in favour of her work*



"If I just find the right man, then I'll be truly happy!"

Gomer had a desperate longing to be wanted and desired by men. As a prostitute, she was used to being approached by them - but Hosea was different. He said something she wasn't expecting: "Marry me".

Suddenly, she had a devoted husband who cared for her, provided for her, loved her and would always protect her. But we're left to assume this life just wasn't enough; she had to get *that feeling* again.

So she went back into selling her body; getting into debt and into trouble. Poor Gomer failed to realise that everything she was looking for was already at home.

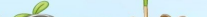
And that's the point. Gomer is a picture of God's people, and by extension all of humanity. Just like Gomer, we spend our lives searching for happiness, excitement, meaning and peace; when it can already be found right where we are - with the God who loves us beyond measure.

The good news is that Gomer's husband is a picture of God. He sought her out again, paid her debts and brought her home. Can happiness really be found in one place? It can if that place is in the arms of God.

Follow the story by reading Hosea chapters 1 and 3

PRAYER FOR GROWTH

God of mission, who alone brings growth to your church, send your Holy Spirit to give: vision to our planning, wisdom to our actions, joy to our worship and power to our witness.



Help our church to grow in numbers, in spiritual commitment to you, and in service to our local community, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Lamentations



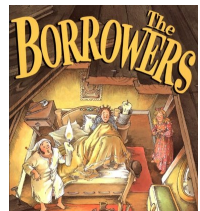
Do you let others see you cry? It can be tempting to hide away when we feel upset and put on a brave face. That's not the case with this book of the Bible!

Lamentations. That's not a word you come across often. It's just a fancy way of saying "really sad"; a kind of weeping-with-grief misery. The book of Lamentations was written soon after the destruction of Jerusalem, when God's people were taken as prisoners into a foreign land. The book describes their raw, bleak devastation and confusion. And, more importantly, we see what breaks God's heart: sin, and the need for Him to bring judgement on people He loves.

If you want to know how to pray for your world, if you want to know what causes God pain, if you want to be moved the way God is, if you want to see everything through His eyes, then Lamentations will take you right into His heart. Lamentations gives us permission to be sad. There are no brownie points for bottling up our feelings. God is big enough and close enough to carry our every emotion and offer us life-changing hope, even at our lowest point.

THE ORIGINAL 'BORROWER'?

Jesus was born in a borrowed manger.
He preached from a borrowed boat.
He entered Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey.
He ate the Last Supper in a borrowed upper room.
He was buried in a borrowed tomb.



Now he asks to borrow the lives of Christians to reach the rest of the world. If we do not speak, then he is dumb and silent.

John Leighton Ford

THE LIGHTHOUSE @ OFFINGTON PARK

As this edition of Spotlight goes to press, our church stands on the brink of *The Lighthouse @ Offington Park* becoming a reality.



The Junior and Baby soft play frames will be installed in the next two weeks and our new Church Community Development Manager, Tess Little, starts with us on 2 April. Now is the time to get really excited!!

We'd love to show you a real-life picture instead of just the design of what has energized the Project Team for the past 15-18 months, but you'll need to wait until the May edition to see it here in print.

There is still much work to do, preparing the community café to receive customers and ensuring we can cater for their needs in terms of providing a welcoming, comfortable physical space and feeding the inner person in terms of a value for money food and drink offering. We will also of course want to offer clean and hygienic toilet facilities and this work is continuing apace.

Tables, chairs, small kitchen appliances and other essential café equipment will be appearing over the next few weeks as we spend the money so generously given/pledged at Gift Day.

If you have pledged items but haven't yet given us the money, please do so as soon as possible. Thank you.

As things currently stand, we will have to change and update our current electrical installation in the kitchen. This is not an easy task and because it involves not only our electrician but also our power provider and Power Networks UK, it is not a simple, quick, or - sadly - an inexpensive fix. This means we may have to refurbish the kitchen in stages, to ensure we are working in a safe environment, but also so that we can offer a modern-looking, clean and clutter-free café area to early users of the soft play straight from the June launch.

Once the work has started, we hope to be able to complete it within a relatively short time, but it is subject to funding being available, and the Project Team are looking at innovative ways to secure the finance we need when we need it.

The Project Team is now turning its thoughts from the physical, fitting-out aspects of the project to the operational side. We have purchased the Web domain www.lighthousesoftplay.com which is

being hosted by GoDaddy alongside our existing Website. Work to build the new Website (which you can't access yet) is in progress. This is an absolute priority so that we can promote the soft play and café, reach out to as many people as possible and start taking online bookings and online payments.

Our other absolute priority is finding people to volunteer in the soft play and/or café when we are open. If you can help in this regard, please speak to Tess, Dawn or Joy.

A prayer for the Lighthouse project:

God of surprises, as we embark on this final leg of our journey of creativity and innovation, we stand before you with hearts filled with gratitude for what is past and hope for what is to come. We seek your blessing upon this project, trusting in your infinite wisdom to illuminate our path and guide our endeavours.

Fill our hearts, minds and spirits with creative inspiration, enabling us to devise inventive approaches and imaginative solutions to bring our ideas to fruition.

Bless our daily efforts with diligence and perseverance, that we may overcome any early setbacks or difficulties with resilience and determination. Strengthen our unity as a team, fostering collaboration, mutual support, and shared purpose.

May this project be a beacon of excellence and achievement, reflecting the values of community, quality, and value for money. May it serve as a source of inspiration and benefit to all who encounter it, contributing to the greater good of our community and the church as we develop opportunities for faith exploration.

Grant us the courage to step outside our comfort zones, to take risks, and to embrace these new opportunities for spiritual growth and learning. We entrust this project into your loving care, knowing that with your guidance, all things are possible. May it unfold according to your divine plan, bringing forth abundance, success, and fulfillment beyond our wildest dreams.

With hearts full of faith and anticipation, we offer this prayer for a successful project, knowing that with you, nothing is impossible.

Amen

RNLI Tour
Saturday 6 April 2024
11:00 am



Growing up in Douglas on the Isle of Man, Sir William Hillary witnessed first-hand the treacherous nature of the sea.

So, in 1823, he made an appeal to the nation via a pamphlet which he had published. The pamphlet detailed Sir Hillary's plan for a lifeboat service which would be manned by trained crews all over the UK. And so, less than a year later in 1824, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) was founded.

This year, the RNLI celebrates 200 years of service. Come and find out how the RNLI started, and how a tragic event off the Worthing coast forced the town to get its own lifeboat and lifeboat station. Our tour will also include the graves of some local lifeboatmen.

Our tour starts at 11 am by the Chapels in South Farm Road. Hot and cold refreshments are available for a small donation. (Please help the planet by bringing your own cup).

Editor's Note:

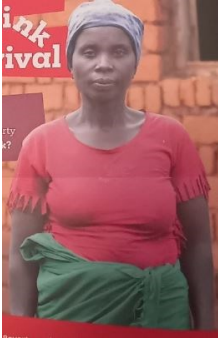
Do something different in 2024 and take one of the tours of this splendid Victorian Cemetery. They really are excellent.

The maintenance programme, which is vital to keep ahead of the ivy growth before headstones are damaged further and plots are lost, is funded by tour income. Plus, with each tour, you get a deep insight into how we used to live. Please support the Friends and help them maintain this always fascinating place.

CHRISTIAN AID WEEK 12-18 May 2024



Christian Aid is pushing back against poverty this year. Poverty is an outrage against humanity. It robs people of dignity and it lets injustice thrive.



Christian Aid is helping people like Aline Nibogora (pictured), a determined mother from Burundi, who was pushed to the limit by poverty. She was abused by her violent husband and forced to flee, homeless and hungry. But she pushed back harder.

With small business training funded by Christian Aid, she kickstarted a vital income for her and her children.

This year Christian Aid Week takes place from 12-18 May. As in previous years we will be placing envelopes on the chairs in church on Sunday 12 May and asking if you could please fill and return them to church on Sunday 19 May or as soon as possible after that date.

We will also be holding a coffee morning in Zach's Café on
Saturday 18 May 10am-12noon
when there will be a Bring and Buy stall and a Cake stall.
We would welcome your support at this event.

Chris & Liz L

HIRE THE ALLAN FLETCHER HALL

To book or enquire, visit
www.offingtonpark.org.uk
[/venue-hire](#)
or email us at
offingtonparkchurch@gmail.com



WHETHER THE WEATHER....?

In April's changing weather show
We witness rain and wind (and sometimes snow).
The mornings wake with dew on grass,
A whispered promise in each breath we pass.

April's air has scents of blooming flowers.
She paints the world with gentle showers.
The sky, a canvas of colours grey and blue,
Interrupted by rainclouds of darkest hue.

Yet April's mood can shift with a will,
From warm, light days to evening chill.
A gusty wind may sweep the land,
Reminding us of nature's hand.

But in this ever-changing symphony,
We find the beauty of diversity.
For April's weather, with its shifting grace,
Reflects the rhythms of life's fleeting race.

So let us cherish April's varied song,
In sun or rain, in calm or tempest strong.
For in its changes, we may come to see
The wondrous beauty of uncertainty.



NEXT TOPIC: TRANSPORT

The Grumpy Old Men will be discussing the following questions on **9 April at 10:00am**:



1. How much does it mean to you to be able to use any form of transport?
2. Do you think your transport choice has an effect on other people, and if so, how?
3. What other transport-related issues make you grumble?

We will be meeting in the Quiet Room, and refreshments will be available from Zach's café.



**CHURCH PASTORAL AID SOCIETY
MINISTRY AMONG WOMEN
WORTHING**

Blooming where we're planted

**A day of worship
and teaching for women**

**FRIDAY 12 APRIL 2024
9.15AM - 2.30PM**

**Cost:
£7.00**

**SPEAKER:
Helen Johnson
featuring "Hope Rising"**

Local Contact:

Church Office



**Offington Park Methodist Church
South Farm Road, Worthing, BN14 7TN**

WHAT'S ON - APRIL 2024

Mon	1		EASTER MONDAY	Zach's Café is closed today
Tue	2	12:00pm	Tuesday Lunch & Social Club	
Thu	4	11:00am	Bible Fellowship	
Sun	7	8:00am	Rev Dawn Carn	Holy Communion
		10:30am	Mrs Joy Barnes	Morning Worship
Mon	8	12:30pm	Thanksgiving Service - Joy Earl	Zach's Café is closed today
		6:45pm	Offington Bells	
Tue	9	10:00am	Grumpy Old Men	Transports of Delight?
		12:00pm	Tuesday Lunch & Social Club	
Thu	11	11:00am	Bible Fellowship	
		2:00pm	Knit 'n' Natter	At home of Linda G - address from Church Office
Fri	12	9:15am	CPAS Day	See poster on page 15
		10:30am	Offington CAMEO	There's a Power in the Music: Rebecca Disney
Sun	14	10:30am	Rev Dawn Carn	Holy Communion
		3:30pm	Messy Church Team	Messy Church
Mon	15	6:45pm	Offington Bells	
Tue	16	12:00pm	Tuesday Lunch & Social Club	
Wed	17	10:30am	Mid-month Holy Communion	
Thu	18	11:00am	Bible Fellowship	
Sun	21	8:00am	Breakfast Church Team	Breakfast Church
		10:30am	Mr Tim Cooper	Morning Worship
Tue	23	12:00pm	Tuesday Lunch & Social Club	

WHAT'S ON - APRIL 2024

Thu	25	11:00am	Bible Fellowship	
		2:00pm	Knit 'n' Natter	
Fri	26	10:30am	Offington CAMEO	"Swap Shop"
Sun	28	10:30am	Rev Dawn Carn	Fun Church
		10:30am	Rev Debra Chidakwa-Akue	Morning Worship
Mon	29	6:45pm	Offington Bells	
Tue	30	12:00pm	Tuesday Lunch & Social Club	

HOW TO TELL IF YOU'RE DRINKING TOO MUCH COFFEE

- ◆ You have a picture of your coffee mug on your coffee mug
- ◆ Your pets are called "Cream" and "Sugar."
- ◆ You're Costa's Employee of the Month -
but you don't even work there
- ◆ Your birthday is a national holiday in Brazil



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THE STORY OF APPLE

(no, not that one!)

This story was told by a Grandfather talking to his grandchild.



“Well, I’m now an old man – old and wrinkly, but when I was younger people kept asking me what I was going to be when I was older – but I didn’t know. “Do you know what you want to be when you’re older?”, he asked me. I didn’t of course. “Well”, he went on, “let me tell you a story about an apple that wasn’t sure what he was going to do either – like me when I was young”.

One day, Apple was sitting in a fruit bowl talking to his friends when Banana asked what everyone wanted to be when they got out of the fruit bowl. Banana said, “I’m going to be a really yummy banana split – a scrumptious pudding for someone special”. “I’m going to be orange juice”, said Orange, “it’s a really tasty breakfast drink and refreshing for whoever drinks it”. Grape said he and the rest of his family wanted to feed a sick person and help them get better.

“What about you, Apple?” Banana asked. Apple didn’t know.

Anyway, time went by and one by one his friends left the fruit bowl and were replaced by new fruit – Apple became friendly with a Pear that wanted to be in a salad with some tasty blue cheese. But then Pear went and Apple was left alone again – alone and still undecided about what he wanted to be. Apple was really missing his friends.

A few days later, Apple was sitting alone in the fruit bowl and feeling sadder than ever.

"I'm too old and wrinkly to be picked now", he thought, so he decided he'd run away and see if he could find something that he could do and where he'd be useful.

He thought he'd try apple bobbing at a party, but he couldn't bear the thought of getting wet, so that was out. Next, he tried to give himself to a teacher but he just sat on her desk unused. Finally, he thought about being a toffee apple at the fair, but he didn't like sticky things all that much. And all the time he was thinking of his friends having a wonderful time being whatever they had wanted to be.

One day, Apple was wandering along on his own when he saw a notice. "*Fruit wanted for artist to draw*", it said. So he went in and was amazed to find that in the artist's fruit bowl were all his friends. "I thought you'd all be something by now", he said.

"Not me", said Banana. "I was too bruised to be a split, so they didn't want me in the restaurant." Orange told Apple that he wasn't needed as they already had enough oranges to make orange juice. "What about you, Grape?" asked Apple. Grape said he was there because at the hospital they only wanted seedless grapes. "So here we all are", said Banana, "old and wrinkled like you".

"Wait a minute," said Orange, "I've got an idea". Orange led them into the garden where they all jumped up and down in front of a man with a spade. The man scooped them up and put them all on his compost heap where, a little while later, they were used to help new fruit grow big and strong".

"So you see", said Grandfather, "even if you're old and wrinkly, like me, and you don't think you have a purpose, don't give up. You can still be useful to somebody".

BIBLE HEROES

David

Perhaps the hardest part of the Christian life is working out what you do when you realise that you've really messed up.

How do you pick yourself up when you've fallen so deeply into sin?

God called David 'a man after my own heart'. But that doesn't mean he was perfect. Far from it. Yet he shows us what it means to respond to sin in faith.

One night, as David paced around on the palace rooftop, he saw the beautiful Bathsheba bathing. One thing led to another and soon David became not just an adulterer, but a murderer too.

When God confronted David over his sin, David didn't wallow, he didn't beat himself up, he didn't lie down and die, and he didn't try to make up for everything he'd done. He responded in faith.

*It's not an easy story to read in places. But if you are being crushed under the weight of your sin, come and observe David modelling how **faith humbly receives God's forgiveness and restoration for even the darkest moments of our lives.***



PRAYER POINTS FOR SOFT PLAY PROJECT

- Pray that we are able to resolve the electrical issues we have with the kitchen and that we can get a working café area and new toilets in the main hall ready for June.
- Pray that we will have the necessary finances to keep the project moving.
- Pray that volunteers will be available to work in the soft play and café, so that we can advance our mission
- Pray for willing listeners that will engage with users to explore faith and meet their spiritual needs.

OFFINGTON CAMEO

All meetings in the Allan Fletcher Hall:

CAMEO

Friday April 12:



"There's a power in the music"
(Nicola leads us in a morning of singing)

Friday April 26:

"Swap Shop"

Swap books, CDs, jigsaws, cooking and
cleaning tips - in fact anything you want!



You are very welcome to join us for coffee at 10:15am
and a prompt start at 10:30am

Margaret H

It's great to see so many younger faces in church of late, and we certainly wish to build relationships with more!

With that objective in mind, the church has established a "20s-50s group" which has been asked to run an event to which we can invite the many folk who bring children to Messy Church, Breakfast Church and Zach's Café.

On **Friday 24 May** we are hosting a
Gala Dinner and Prize Quiz.

Invites will be sent out in mid-late April, so if you know of someone in this age range that might like this evening, please let the **Church Office** know as soon as possible.

PLEASE NOTE that the event will be FREE to the invited guests, but thanks to a generous voluntary donation from a member of the group, there is no cost to the church.

20:50

MOTORING

Used Car Market Update



We've run several articles about new and electric cars recently, but what of the used car market. Where is that going? Let's see.

Bottom line: used car values are starting to fall noticeably after four years of artificially high prices, and are likely to continue falling, with used EV prices falling further and faster than petrol cars. But why?

Fleet sales were hit hard during the pandemic years. Lockdowns meant that car manufacturers couldn't build cars and car dealers couldn't sell cars. But there were few fleet customers anyway as firms were busy trying to adapt to a work-from-home environment. Lockdowns created a worldwide and severe parts shortage, which impacted the making of new cars for some time after lockdown. With limited supply, they prioritised selling to private customers who don't get the massive bulk discounts enjoyed by fleets.

Fleets at the time were also stopping unnecessary spending during the pandemic years, which meant keeping vehicles for longer. A shortage of new cars, and reduced fleet sales created the 'perfect storm', where fewer used cars hit the market, pushing used car prices up significantly. If you bought used during those years, you likely paid much more than expected or reduced your expectations.

Now, fleets are urgently replacing all the cars that have passed their 'sell-by dates', coinciding with car manufacturers finally returning to normal production levels. Result? A vastly increased number of used cars coming onto the market, pushing prices back down again.

Anxious to sell new cars, dealers are offering significant discounts to attract the few private customers, pushing used car prices down. Used cars are now cheaper than they've been since 2021.

So what does that mean for 2024 and the years ahead?

Well, politically, inflation is falling again, but interest rates falls look unlikely, lowering demand for any cars. This year will also see a general election. This could be damaging to showrooms if it is called around the next big new car sales month of September. Bizarrely, the first Olympics in a UK-friendly time zone since 2012 could mean a quiet fortnight for car dealers this summer as millions of people spend their weekends on the sofa cheering on Team GB.

The used EV market inevitably follows the new car market. New EV sales are leading to a rapidly growing number of used EVs arriving. New EV prices are also falling as competition increases. So EV used car values have fallen quickly and are now in line with petrol cars. There are now over 1m EVs on UK roads, but most are between one and three years old, meaning most haven't hit the used market yet. We still haven't seen the full impact and the number of used EVs for customers to choose from is set to grow significantly over the course of this year, helping to push prices down further.

Add in the Government's Zero Emissions Vehicle Mandate, which requires at least 22% of all new car sales to be EV's. As March began, it was 16%. That means more discounts for private buyers and more pressure on fleets to take more new EVs more quickly. Result? Even further falls in used EV prices. Sound familiar?

However, manufacturers who miss the 22% target face enormous fines and may choose to stop taking orders for petrol, diesel and hybrid cars before December, forcing customers to wait. This will put upwards pressure on used car demand and prices later in 2024.

So, if you have a car that you're thinking about selling, it's probably worth doing it sooner rather than later, before the Olympics and election. Values right now are mostly still above average, but they are falling. In the new car market, there'll be some great deals likely on many EV models. New petrol car prices could level out towards the end of the year, especially if firms are forced to stop those sales to hit their EV targets. Unsure about what to do? Join the club!!



PRAYERS FOR UKRAINE & GAZA

Dear Lord, our faithful source of compassion and peace, in this continuing time of turmoil and strife, we turn our hearts and our thoughts to Ukraine and Gaza, lands battered by conflict and uncertainty. We pray for the people there, who endure the ravages of war with courage and resilience.

Grant strength to those who are suffering, comfort to those who mourn, and solace to those who have lost their homes and loved ones. Surround them with your love and protection, and guide them through the darkness with the light of hope.

We pray for wisdom and compassion to prevail among leaders and nations, that they may seek peaceful resolutions and uphold the dignity and rights of all people. May dialogue replace discord, and understanding replace aggression, ushering in a climate of reconciliation and healing.

We pray for the hardworking peacemakers and humanitarian workers who strive to alleviate suffering and bring aid to those in need. May their efforts bring comfort and relief.

We pray that love, unity and solidarity will transcend boundaries of nationality, religion, and ideology. Help us to recognize the inherent humanity in every individual and to stand together in support of justice, peace, and reconciliation.

We lift up our prayers for Ukraine and Gaza, entrusting their people and their future into your compassionate hands.

May the winds of peace blow across the lands of Gaza, Russia and Ukraine, and may the seeds of hope take root and flourish, bringing forth a future of harmony and prosperity for all.

Amen

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called
the children of God.

Matthew 5:9



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MONEY MATTERS

2024 in perspective



Last month, Chancellor Jeremy Hunt delivered what is certain to be the last Budget of this Parliament. Normally, before a general election, every Chancellor wants to cut taxes to make us feel better and vote for their party again. So, did Jeremy make us better off, or is it all smoke and mirrors?

There was a marginal increase in child benefit, but with that exception there is arguably no encouraging news for the lower paid and those for whom life is a continual financial challenge.

Local authorities are under extreme financial pressure with an estimated 10% expecting to face bankruptcy in the next year. Remediation will take the form of severe cuts in services, which will impact those who most need support. Cuts in local authority grants are likely and those charities dependent upon grants will in turn have to make challenging decisions on cost cutting or face closure.

There was a welcome cut in National Insurance, but whilst families with average annual earnings will see a benefit from reduced contributions, this is likely to be more than offset by continuing levels of interest rates and inflation.

Separate to the budget, the energy price cap will fall by an average of 12% in the second quarter of the year. For those on standard or variable tariffs, energy prices are set to fall in line with the cap, but costs are still approximately 40% higher than they were two years ago.

For small business owners, from 1st April 2024 the taxable turnover threshold which determines registration for VAT will be increased by £5,000 pa to £90,000 pa. Those businesses with annual turnover below the VAT threshold will pay £1,250 pa less in VAT.

On the brighter side for many of our readers, those in receipt of a state pension will see an increase of 8.5%. This will undoubtedly provide some relief, especially to those senior citizens for whom it is the only source of income and who are therefore dependent on it.

So, what does all this mean for the church?

The income of members who give regularly by standing order or cash, and of those who attend our church and contribute to the weekly offertory is unlikely to rise significantly. As the costs of maintaining our church buildings and mission initiatives will likely continue to increase at the level of inflation or above, church budgets will again be under increased pressure.

We did have a very good response to our Gift Day, however, with over £12,000 freely gifted. Grateful thanks are due to everyone who donated. **If you haven't donated and would like to, please speak to the Treasurer.** We can also claim Gift Aid on a proportion of gifted income, which is worth an extra 25% of the value of the gift where the giver pays enough tax to cover the extra amount.

We hope that we can use the gifts wisely to extend our hospitality beyond the current boundaries and welcome in more of the community, in turn developing more mission initiatives and building God's kingdom at Offington Park.

In the meantime, however, the conclusions reached from the Autumn Statement appear even more relevant: "the strong must help the weak". Those who are able are more than ever needed to serve and support their communities through the ministries of the church. We have many ways in which YOU can serve OUR community, from helping out in Zach's café to volunteering in the Lighthouse soft play and cafe. Please ask at the Welcome Desk, or talk to Dawn if you want to be a visible, active part of our mission.

Springwatch



As March gives way to April, the dawn chorus frequently heralds in the sunnier mornings as the 'early birds' flex their vocal chords. Over the coming months, birds will sing to stake out territory and attract a mate. Soon, our resident birds will be accompanied in song by early arriving summer visitors.

Warblers are a group of birds which can be difficult to distinguish on sight. They have mostly brown or olive colour plumage and sharp, slim beaks to aid their insect-heavy diets. They are easy to tell apart by listening out for their springtime tunes.

Due to changing climate, small numbers of warblers are starting to spend winter in the UK. Most warblers, however, migrate from their warmer overwintering grounds in Africa. It's quite a journey, requiring them to prepare by feeding extensively. They can even double in weight!

Towards the end of March and into early April, the cascading melody of the Willow Warbler will join the choral symphony and we will see Sand Martins joining us from their overwintering grounds south of the Sahara and skimming over bodies of water, performing aerial acrobatics to catch insects on the wing. Sand Martins don't build cup-shaped, mud or clay nests in the same way as their close relatives, the House Martin and the Swallow. Instead, during their breeding season, they nest in sand or gravel burrows along riverbanks or in cliffs where they dig tunnels and bore out a space to bring up their young. Sand Martins are social birds and breed in colonies.

Keep your eyes to the sky for these early arriving birds as we welcome in the spring. Their return promises warmer weather to come.

The quick eruption of blossom in spring is a reminder of how fast the seasons pass by, and the importance of slowing down and savouring fleeting moments.

If you're a walker, keep a look out for Blackthorn, one of the first blossom to come into flower, along with Cherry Plum, pear and plum. Lesser Celandine, a member of the buttercup family, is also a clear marker that spring is on its way, adding a splash of cheery colour to bare ground. Woodlands will soon be full of the rich scent of Wild Garlic flowers.

One way to connect with nature this spring is to get planting in your garden or green space. At this time of year, bees and butterflies will be seeking out a feast after the cold winter. The warmer temperatures bring the first moths and butterflies of the season. Most moths and butterflies spend their winter in the larval stage (as caterpillars), but some will pupate through the colder months, ready to welcome the spring with new wings.

However, our early emerging butterflies that you're likely to spot in spring overwinter as dormant adults. Look carefully and you'll be able to spot Brimstones, Small Tortoiseshells, Peacocks and Commas. They'll be looking to feed up on nectar-rich blooms in your garden or local green space.

Early spring is a perfect time to see frog and toad spawn in our ponds and pools. In fact, amphibians' breeding seasons begin as early as Valentine's Day! There are two species of frog, two species of toads and three species of newts native to the UK.

Toads are known for their mass mammoth migrations, often covering as great a distance as two kilometres to return to their breeding ponds and find a partner.

Frogs also return to the ponds where they were born to breed, and the males grab female attention by croaking. Meanwhile, male newts attract a mate by performing elaborate displays with their tails, and the females then lay their eggs in underwater vegetation.

Frog spawn, which is found in large clumps of jelly, and toad spawn which clings together in a string-like structure will also be visible, so keep your eyes open and enjoy this lovely season.

JC's LITTLE NUGGETS

"Prejudice and God's Love"

(John 1: 43-51)



My Dad always told me to "never judge a book by its cover", because people may not be what you expect.

Easy to say, but not so easy to do in practice. Judging and prejudice are in our DNA and as old as the human race.

Two millennia ago, Nathanael (a.k.a. Bartholomew) showed his bias when in v46 - without even seeing Jesus - he declared "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"

A similar thing happened to me when, aged 30, I went for an interview. Yes, dear reader, I actually did work once!

I looked at the person from HR and, without exchanging a word, summed him up in my mind as a right "Flash Harry". In a similar way, he looked at me, and I could see him thinking, "what a fat whatnot".

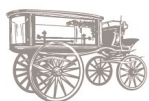
During the interview he implied that only people fit in body and fit in mind could do the job. Then came the killer words "So you're a Geordie. Has anything good ever come out of Newcastle?" I left in disgust, but with God's help I was somehow offered the job and we became great friends.

When Nathanael and Jesus eventually met, Jesus showed no bias and Nathaniel recognised Him as the Son of God.

These Bible verses and my experience show just how wrong we can be if we allow ourselves to make snap judgements about others. We can be certain, however, that there is no bias or prejudice in how God sees us, and no conflict or barriers can stand against His constant and transforming love.

God bless you all.

JC



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NEXT EDITION

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offingtonspotlight@gmail.com

Two senior citizens, Fred and Sam, decided one evening to go and see a film at the local cinema.

The film had hardly started when Sam heard Fred rustling about in the dark. In the reflected light of the film, Sam could see Fred reaching around under all of the seats.

"What on earth are you doing, Fred?" asked Sam, "you're disturbing everyone's enjoyment".

Fred indignantly responded, "I had a caramel in my mouth and it dropped out. I'm trying to find it!"

This slightly annoyed Sam, who told him not to worry about it. "We can get another caramel at the interval. Anyway, that one's ruined now it's been on the floor".

"But I've got to find it," said Fred, exasperated. "My teeth are in it!"



Offington Park Methodist Church,
South Farm Road, Worthing,
BN14 7TN

Tel: 01903 205722

Email: office@offingtonpark.org.uk

Web: www.offingtonpark.org.uk

