

# Pathways

The magazine for the people of the Diocese of Oxford | Winter 2024 | **FREE**

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## A better world

*By social action or seeking justice?*

PLUS: Diversity | Extreme action? | Empowering others



### Share God's love

How we apply the teachings of Jesus to the lives we lead today is a question which every Christian wrestles with at some point. Within the commandments God gave us were the two greatest, to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, and to love our neighbour as ourselves.

The gospel teachings give us some pointers on how to put this into practice. In Matthew 25.40 we hear: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." (NIV).

Whichever path you choose, social action – using God's gifts for you to help those at the edges of your community, marginalised and vulnerable, or social justice – giving a voice to those who may not have one, campaigning for change in a world unable to see another way, we are called to walk a different path, the way of love.

Through these actions the beauty of God's love, his grace and his unending promise to all of us shines for those who do not know it.

### In this edition

We take a closer look at social action and social justice, and the steps we can take to help people in our communities. How can we ensure everyone has a voice and, even more importantly, everyone is listened to (page 7)?

Phil Evans looks at this theme within the Bible. What does it say about justice, how can we apply this in practice and what happens when love and justice come together (page 10)? Opinion on page 12 explores how two Christians have taken a very different approach to climate justice and keeping in step with nature.

If you're feeling overwhelmed, wondering if the actions of one person can make a difference, be inspired by page 15 with suggestions on how to turn a desire to help into action.

I hope this edition of *Pathways* awakens in you a curiosity about the world around you, our place in it, and how we can make change.

Bishop Steven  
[oxford.anglican.org/bishop-of-oxford](http://oxford.anglican.org/bishop-of-oxford)

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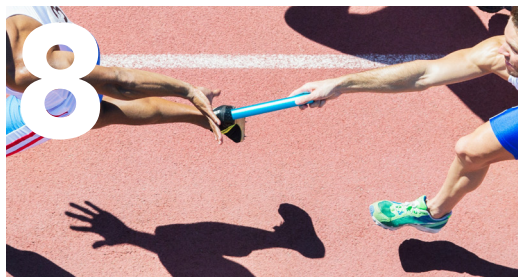
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We hope you enjoy reading *Pathways*. Email or write and let us know what you think. Contributor enquiries are welcome.

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Ed Nix



## Together for peace and unity

Hundreds of people came together in Oxford to stand in solidarity, remembrance and peace with the Middle East and anyone living with conflict. The vigil was organised by the Oxfordshire Civic, Community and Faith Leaders' Group, led by Bishop Steven and Imam Monawar Hussain. Faith and community leaders shared prayers and readings and held two minutes' silence.

[oxford.anglican.org/news/hundreds-gather-in-peace](https://oxford.anglican.org/news/hundreds-gather-in-peace)

For regular news and updates, visit the website: [oxford.anglican.org/news](https://oxford.anglican.org/news)

Jane Willis

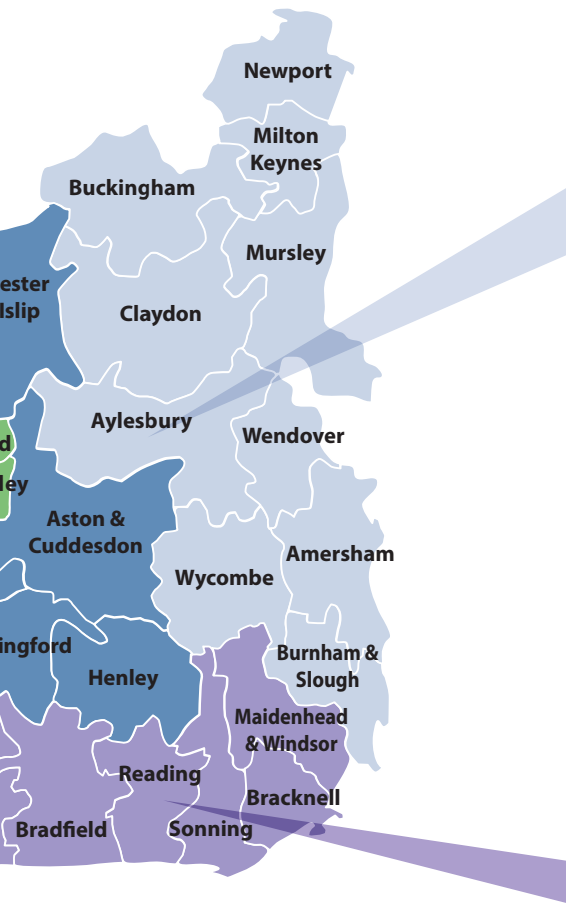


## Art project gives insight into opera

Pupils around Wallingford had a taste of theatre at a Christian workshop and performance of C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, hosted by Dorchester Abbey. The project was funded thanks to a grant from the diocesan Development Fund and formed part of the ten-day Dorchester Festival. The event was such a success, the Abbey is hoping to repeat it.

[oxford.anglican.org/news/childrens-theatre-project](https://oxford.anglican.org/news/childrens-theatre-project)





David Furze

## Outstanding green projects

Three initiatives from around the diocese, including St Peter's, Quarrendon, were shortlisted for the *Church Times* Green Awards. The community garden was included in the green health category in recognition of their work growing healthy, sustainable food, using the garden as a place to build relationships, connect with the community and learn horticultural skills.

[oxford.anglican.org/news/local-creation-care](http://oxford.anglican.org/news/local-creation-care)



FOAT

## Charity couple made canons

Leslie and Bridget Green, from Reading, have been made honorary lay canons for setting up the Friends of Amani Tanzania (FOAT) charity. FOAT, which is supported by, among others, St Luke and St Bartholomew's in Reading and St Peter's in Earley, works with families who have disabled children and, more recently, families whose children have albinism.

[oxford.anglican.org/news/couple-honoured-for-work](http://oxford.anglican.org/news/couple-honoured-for-work)

We're on social media too. Search "Diocese of Oxford" on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.

*"I am made in the  
image of God, and  
so are you."*



# Nudrat Hopper

**Nudrat Hopper** is a Congregational Development and Community Organiser at St Frideswide's Church, Water Eaton, Milton Keynes.

"There aren't very many of us around," Nudrat tells me. She's referring to her pioneering role, using training and tools developed for Community Organising. It's easy to jump to the conclusion that she spends her time simply organising what people do, but this is far from the truth. Her work is about enabling people's voices to be heard. Not just certain voices, but *everyone's* voice.

The church is located near a very deprived housing estate. Nudrat explains that sometimes people keep quiet about their problems, thinking they are just a private matter. Perhaps there is an issue with housing. Others may be struggling with that housing situation too, and if their voices are not heard it can mask injustice.

As Nudrat encourages people that they have something to say, a sense of solidarity with others develops, and some even begin to grow into leaders.

One of the maxims of Community Organising is "People over programme". Nudrat is aware how easily we can get caught up in running a church, in the institution, and people can get left behind. It's not surprising that this happens – it takes much time and energy working for a church.

She gives me an example of the "People over programme" approach in action. St Frideswide is involved in a building project. The building will be shared with 17 community groups. Not only does Nudrat find out what each group wants, but she discusses with colleagues whose opinion might have been ignored. What do the young people need? What do the choir think?

A question that Nudrat carries with her all of the time is "Where is God in all of this?" Frequently

pausing to reflect helps to direct her actions. She's realised that while it's a strength that faith drives people to act, it can be a weakness if we rush to set up a project without investigating the underlying causes of people's problems.

"As Archbishop Tutu said, 'There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in.'"

The church can appear quite middle class to the people who are drawn in from the neighbouring estate. Some come to "Soup for the Soul" for lunch, a chat and a short talk about spiritual matters.

Again, listening to people's voices becomes transformative. People who describe themselves as coming from a non-Christian background, or another faith background, are welcomed. They are encouraged to discuss the Bible passage. Some remain silent at first, but the encouragement continues, and when they do feel able to contribute a connection with others develops. One man resisted the label "Christian" but said he found his home at the church.

I end the conversation by asking what Nudrat likes about being a Christian. After some thought, she says, "The constant reminder that I am made in the image of God, and so are you." 🙏

Words: Ruth Hamilton-Jones  
Photo: Beka Sharrock



Contact Hannah Ling, our Social Justice Adviser, if you would like to know more about the Community Organising methodology:  
[hannah.ling@oxford.anglican.org](mailto:hannah.ling@oxford.anglican.org)





# Empower others

Jesus' ministry was one of empowerment from start to finish – even today we are unlikely to look to fishermen as likely church leaders.

**Serena Tajima** considers empowerment in today's church.

I'm the vicar of St Mary's Church in Banbury. St Mary's is part of the Inclusive Church network and The Heart Edge network of churches too. Empowerment matters to me. Sometimes simply being seen, the whole person that you are, can be empowering in and of itself.

If you look different from the norm it can feel disempowering to stand up in a role that makes you stand out from the crowd. As a woman of colour, I have often had people say to me, "Oh, you don't look like a priest!"

During my curacy at St Luke's in Reading I had a very supportive training incumbent. However, I did struggle, as most of the priests I had seen throughout my life were white men. It took me some time and reflection to truly accept and own that I am a priest.

One day during my curacy, after a service where I had preached, a black woman and her granddaughter came up to me. She said to the child, "See, you can do it too." This made me realise how important it is to be visible and to do what God has called me to do.

At St Mary's we have been working on expanding our church choir and have been blessed to have some secondary school children join. One of them is of shared heritage, and I remember thinking, "She looks like me." After her second service, she asked if we could have a chat and said how great it was to see a priest that looked like her. We talked about some of the challenges being shared heritage presents, but also the blessings. It was

good to be able to show this young person that being a leader of shared heritage is possible.

God has called me, the whole person that I am, to be a priest, to minister to the people, to preach the gospel and to speak out against injustice. However, whenever I do a funeral visit, I still have in the back of my mind that the family might not want me to take their family member's funeral, either because I'm a woman or because of the colour of my skin. Although I believe attitudes are changing and people are more accepting of people's differences, it is important that we have people who look different out in the world in roles and jobs that challenge

*"You don't look like a priest!"*

assumptions.

So, if you don't feel you fit the norm or what's expected in positions of leadership, be encouraged to follow your sense of calling. Don't let difference stand in the way of what God is calling you to. See it as a gift and an opportunity instead.

If you look like everyone else in the room, ask yourself who is missing and why? Is there someone who you could encourage or empower to be in that space, or even to take the lead? ¶

*Words: The Revd Serena Tajima, Vicar of St Mary's, Banbury  
Photo: Shutterstock*



Share a special video for children on challenging misconceptions and reclaiming narratives:  
[oxford.anglican.org/reclaiming-narratives](https://oxford.anglican.org/reclaiming-narratives)

# Justice

**Phil Evans** of Christian Aid considers how principles of justice in the Bible can be applied in practice. What happens when love and justice come together?

In the Old Testament, two words are often used together: *mishpat* and *tzedakah*.

*Mishpat* is generally translated as justice, and encompasses fairness, equity and impartiality – such as the laws that apply to everyone equally and the rights everyone is due. Over and over again, *mishpat* describes taking care of widows, orphans, immigrants and the poor. God loves and defends those with the least economic and social power, and so should we.

*Tzedakah* is often translated as righteousness, and means living a life of right relationships.

We see these two words together in numerous Bible verses, such as when Amos says, “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (Amos 5.24). Both justice and righteousness are needed to create a society where everyone can flourish.

At Christian Aid we believe that poverty is political. Rather than being an unfortunate accident, it is caused by human structures and systems and of being excluded from decision-making. That means bringing about justice is both about meeting people’s needs and challenging unjust structures that keep people in poverty.

I’ve been particularly inspired by the actions of one of our partners, Dr Hassan from the Palestinian

Medical Relief Society (PMRS). During the current conflict in Gaza, his home was destroyed and he ended up sleeping in his car while his family live in a container. Despite the hardship, he cycles around destroyed neighbourhoods treating people who are unable to access healthcare. PMRS medical teams have cared for over 400,000 sick and injured people in the last year.

But justice isn’t just about social action. If all we are doing is treating the symptoms of injustice, then we are not bringing about true justice or restoring right relationships. In many cases this means challenging unjust laws and informing people about their rights. Campaigning can also pressure governments and businesses to act with justice.

“... we believe that poverty is political”

That’s why Christian Aid supporters have been signing a petition to call on the UK government to demand an immediate ceasefire between Hamas and Israel, ensure aid can reach those who desperately need it, and stop arms sales to Israel in line with international law.

I grew up supporting charities that did great work in their own contexts. But I also appreciate the power of campaigning on issues like Drop the Debt, climate justice and bringing peace in situations of conflict. Large numbers of people acting in solidarity with our vulnerable neighbours can truly compel governments and businesses to act in the name of justice and righteousness. 🙏

For more information and to support the Gaza Appeal: [christianaid.org.uk/appeals/emergencies/gaza-appeal](https://christianaid.org.uk/appeals/emergencies/gaza-appeal)

Words: Phil Evans, Christian Aid  
Photo: Dr Hassan in action, © PMRS/Christian Aid. Higher-resolution photographs of Dr Hassan were unavailable from this war zone.



# Extreme action?



**The Revd Tim Hewes**  
is a member of our  
clergy in Wantage.

Years ago, I asked my 16-year-old son, "Why do you want to study medicine? I hope it's not because you want to be like Hawkeye in the TV series *M\*A\*S\*H?*"

"No," he replied. I didn't believe him. He continued with something about wanting to help people and save lives.

"Well," I said, "if you really want to save lives, become a politician. A doctor saves lives one at a time, while politicians have the power to save or take thousands of lives at the stroke of a pen." He's now a consultant surgeon.

So here is the dilemma: *social action* – small-scale, hands-on local action, or *social justice* – large-scale, to get change from the movers and shakers, the policy makers, at any level.

In 2018 Sir David Attenborough said of Greta Thunberg and her schools strike that they represented the first glimmer of hope he had seen for the planet. So, I threw myself into non-violent direct action (NVDA) with Extinction Rebellion

because I wanted to try to fan that glimmer of hope into a roaring flame. The objective was to force the government to act dramatically to mitigate the climate emergency.

I saw this as a struggle against "principalities and powers" (Ephesians 6.12, NKJV).

*"You cannot be a bystander"*

Many people have expressed their support for me: friends, church leaders, police inspectors, court officials. They often say, "I get it – the climate emergency." Then they often say; "Thank you for representing me." But I do not represent anyone. I can't.

It's like being a bystander to a violent assault and watching as a single person struggles to stop the assailants, while others look on and say, "You're doing great, thanks for representing me." In these times of burgeoning climate chaos, you cannot be represented. You cannot be a bystander as the climate catastrophe makes vast swathes of our planet uninhabitable, triggering huge migrations.

We are not supposed to be like lemmings, meekly following each

*Continues overleaf...*

In each edition of *Pathways*, we ask two Christians with different perspectives to explore a topical issue. Many in our churches are working towards a better world through actions in the local community. Fewer want to change the world through protest. We wanted to explore the motivation behind two people acting in very different ways for a common cause.

There's a great deal of fear surrounding the climate and biodiversity crisis. And fear breeds a sense of helplessness, and helplessness can in turn lead to inaction.

We are all tasked with being stewards of the earth. The Church of England's fifth Mark of Mission is: "To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth." My faith encourages me to strive for this; to live in hope that our miraculous earth can renew itself (if we could just stop abusing it!). That faith and hope leads me to action – action to take care of our environment and to encourage others to do so too.

I've grown vegetables forever! I'm not very good at it, but I love getting my hands in the soil and reminding myself that the earth is full of life.

My earliest memories are in the garden, pricking out carrots alongside my dad, with a robin hopping about looking for worms. In the evening, we would sit down together as a family, often with other

people, and give thanks for the food on our plate. I saw how food brings people together, that by giving thanks we are recognising the many people who have grown that food and are thinking of others who may be going hungry. It taught me to be grateful for my food every single day.

*“there is a better way”*

Growing food is humbling – it reminds us of the many hurdles farmers face, whether it is drought, excess rainfall or pests. It can also provide any home with some much-needed nutrition (depleted in supermarket vegetables, which may well have been picked prematurely, stored and have travelled thousands of miles).

How many people have access to good food, or have the opportunity to grow their own food? Our urban lifestyles make it increasingly hard to do this, but I've always encouraged people to have a go at growing food, even if it's simply in a planter on a windowsill. I've established school and community gardens and run an organisation supporting dozens of community gardens across Lambeth, South London.



**Janie Bickersteth**  
worships at the  
University Church of St  
Mary the Virgin, Oxford  
and works with Good  
Food Oxfordshire.

*Continues overleaf...*

other over the cliff to mass extinction. We need courage.

Women have the vote because of the courage and determination of the suffragettes. Success for NVDA. Gandhi went on hunger strike, in protest against the British government's actions. His non-violent direct action proved pivotal. Success for NVDA. In the USA, the Freedom Riders defied the ban on segregation on buses. After hundreds were beaten up and imprisoned, the government gave in, and interstate travel was desegregated. Success for NVDA.

But climate justice requires more than NVDA. As the movement grows, there is a demand to make ecocide law and prosecute those responsible. Individuals are taking governments and companies to court for the destructive impacts of the climate crisis on health, biodiversity and the environment. Banking investments are being challenged and the media shamed into telling the truth.

There are many ways to work for climate justice, but work we must, courageously, without counting the cost. We cannot hide from this reality. ¶

Now my day job is to support those who steward the earth, passionate people who are farming in step with nature and choosing not to use chemicals on the land, with incomes not much more than the minimum wage.

Our current food system, though supremely efficient, is in many ways broken. A visit to any supermarket reminds us of just how much unhealthy food is being pedalled. Additionally, "real" unprocessed food – and food that hasn't had countless rounds of herbicide and pesticide sprayed on it – is either not available or is just too pricey for most people. *Real* food needs to be available to everyone.

I lead a project called OxFarmToFork, bringing fresh food from Oxfordshire farms into institutions in Oxford. I work with (mostly organic) farmers who plant food year after year, however bad the previous harvest (and yes, it has been bad this year). Their actions reveal a faith and hope that the earth can deliver, and their conviction that there is a better way to farm – a way in which they are in step with nature – shows trust, faith, hope and love. ¶

## Further reading

***The Hopeful Activist*** by Rich Gower and Rachel Walker

Subtitled *Discovering the vital change you were made to bring*, this book from SPCK provides an easy-to-use framework to help Christians move from helplessness to hopeful action. Featuring contributions from Shane Claiborne, Lisa Sharon Harper, Krish Kandiah, Sam Wells and many more, *The Hopeful Activist* is full of practical advice to help you play your part in bringing God's justice and restoration to the world around you. Suitable for those who don't know where to begin and those who are already so active that they are close to burnout.

***Christian Faith and Social Justice: Five Views***, Edited by Vic McCracken

This anthology brings together the thoughts of five Christian philosophers who each take a different perspective on social justice in the Christian tradition. The writers look at libertarianism, political liberalism, liberation theology, feminism and virtue ethics.

## Good food

OxFarmToFork  
**[goodfoodoxford.org/ox-farm-to-fork](http://goodfoodoxford.org/ox-farm-to-fork)**

If you know of a school or other institution that might be interested in joining OxFarmToFork, get in touch: **[janie@gfo.org.uk](mailto:janie@gfo.org.uk)**

Inspired to grow your own food? The Royal Horticultural Society website has a wealth of tips and advice on how to get started.  
**[rhs.org.uk/advice/grow-your-own](http://rhs.org.uk/advice/grow-your-own)**

More locally, Oxfordshire-based Replenish Oxfordshire is on a mission to help residents and community groups to grow and cook nutritious food with zero wastage. Their advice ranges from getting started to the recipes you can cook with your produce.  
**[replenishoxfordshire.com/growing-at-home](http://replenishoxfordshire.com/growing-at-home)**

# What can we do?

A lot of people are depressed by what's in the news. Some even block out news reports for the sake of their mental health. Can we achieve any sort of balance between issues that loom large and our capacity to cope with them?

Turn on the news, check social media, or speak to your neighbours, and it won't take long before you're confronted with real stories of poverty, inequality, racism, war, natural disaster or climate degradation.

We might become numb to what's happening in the world because it just feels like the norm, or divert our attention elsewhere because it all feels too much. But we're not powerless. Let's spend a moment exploring how we can be light in the darkness *without* feeling it's totally unmanageable or being overwhelmed.

## Do your "little bit of good"

Sometimes we do nothing because it feels like the problem is too big or we won't make a difference. And, honestly, we've often got a lot on our own plates; trying to keep our heads above water while supporting close friends and family.

Desmond Tutu once said: "Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world."

Your little bit of good will add to the multitude of good being offered by people all around the world. We're not meant to do everything; it's not all or nothing.

What's the little bit of good you're already doing? Keep doing it with patience, love and persistence.

Is there a new little bit of good that you could begin? Listen to where the Spirit of God might be leading you, and then take just one small step. You never know where it might take you.

## Do good together

You'll have heard it said that "no man is an island" (the title of a poem by John Donne) – we are all interconnected, in so many intricate ways. As Paul says: "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it." (1 Corinthians 12.26, NIV).

We see this happening even beyond the church. In the areas of physical health, mental health, drug abuse, education, imprisonment, trust and community life, outcomes for everyone are significantly worse in more unequal countries, not just those at the sharp end of poverty and inequality (*The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*, Pickett and Wilkinson).

In the same way, we were never meant to hold the weight of the whole world alone. As Christians, we know God is always with us, and we are part of a very large family. Doing things together is more manageable, impactful, sustainable and fun.

We can be connected to those outside the church too. We may join with those of good faith beyond the church to take action for a better world, as well as with Christian siblings.

## Lighten things up

There is a time for everything – a time for lamenting, weeping, mourning, and anger at the way things are. But it doesn't *always* need to feel heavy. There is also a time for creativity, for building the new, for joyful celebration, and for restorative mending. To sustain our action, and to bring a bit of God's kingdom to earth, we must celebrate the joy of living, of each other, and the

good things God has given us. We acknowledge the way the world currently is, but we also seek to reflect how God intended the world to be.

## Remember the why

Every person is made in God's image and deserves to flourish with dignity simply because they are a precious and beloved child of God.

When we remember the "why" of what we're doing, it's clear that we can't just do nothing. We can't talk about the love of God for humanity and for the world, and not act on this belief. Simply put: "Faith by itself, if is not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2.17–23, NIV).

## Rejoice in small beginnings

For each of us, how we respond to all that's going on around us will look different. But whatever we do, we know that God rejoices to see the work start with small beginnings (Zechariah 4.10).

It's not guaranteed, but there's a possibility these small beginnings may turn into something unexpected along the way; transformative initiatives, movements or activism often start small.

None of us has all the answers, but if we do our little bit of good in partnership with others, with a vision of bringing God's kingdom to earth, that's certainly a manageable place to start.

## Keep close to God

Remember to continuously share your thoughts and feelings with God in prayer. Ask God to direct your vision and actions so that they will be a blessing to others. Ask God to reveal any truth about a situation that will help to bring about God's kingdom.

## Don't give up

You will probably have to be persistent to make lasting changes, so be prepared for that and pace yourself accordingly. Be willing to adapt your plans as things develop and as you listen to what others think – you might know where to start but you don't know where you will finish! 🍊

*Photo: Shutterstock*





# Make a difference

We asked **Hannah Ling**, our Social Justice Adviser, to give us nine large, small or surprising ways we can make the world a better place. It isn't a to-do list – might you pick one idea?

1

**Gather a group** – find others in your church and wider community who share a common concern. Start with prayer and conversation.

2

**Listen** – have conversations with people outside your normal circles to get a better understanding of an issue you want to address.

3

**Make a church prayer board** – add news clippings and community concerns. Offer these to God and boldly ask for God's help.

4

**Read** – *The Everyday God: Encountering the divine in the works of mercy* by Jonathan Arnold has compelling true stories of social action.

5

**Learn about rural hidden hardship** – search for the devotional study guide on the Hidden Hardship website. Study it alone or with others.

6

**Explore Community Organising** – chat with Hannah about how you and your church can get involved. (01865 208213)

7

**Meet your MP** – with a few members of your church. MPs can advocate for things that matter to your community. Discuss your priorities.

8

**Order oranges** – if you live in Oxford/Witney areas (other areas in 2025). Check out [orangesforjustice.co.uk](http://orangesforjustice.co.uk), set up by a parishioner in Witney.

9

**Become an Eco Church** – or take other steps to a greener church. Discover many ways your church can care for the planet on our EcoHub.

# Diversity

In the wake of the summer's far-right riots there is growing division in the UK, with racist hate directed towards Muslims, asylum seekers and refugees. How can embracing diversity counteract this hate?

A recent conversation with friends over dinner revealed some of their misconceptions about the UK's asylum system, a result of misinformation. I was able to share insights I'd gained from my work and through conversations with asylum-seeker friends that counteracted their assumptions.

How often are we naively ignorant of other people's realities? To avoid these misunderstandings and stereotypes, we must actually know (not just live close to) people who are different from ourselves – to build relationships with curiosity, openness and kindness.

These relationships allow us to live more fully in the vision God has for us. "God created man in his own image" (Genesis 1.27), and the psalms reveal, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Psalm 19:1, NIV). God created the diversity of humanity and of the natural world, each revealing to us something of the person and nature of God.

The beauty and richness of different experiences and backgrounds not only enriches our lives and perspectives, but give us new insights into the person of Jesus and help us see others' God-created personhood. With deep listening we can break down misconceptions, understand what

others experience, and broaden our perspectives, which in turn allows us to judge less, and love more.

The diocese is looking to develop work alongside Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) communities, so I've been speaking to GRT people, and to chaplains and support workers across the Church of England. I've learnt so much about cultures and ways of life different to my own, experiences of racism and marginalisation, as well as discovering different outworkings of faith.

St Sebastian's (Wokingham Without) have made connections with those living on the nearby Travellers site, such as the Wilson family. When they tragically lost their son last year, the church drew alongside them. Their vicar, Rickey Simpson-Gray, describes this relationship as involving courage from both parties.

Trust between the communities grew, and even led to the Wilson family donating money to the church in their son's memory. St Sebastian's has experienced how, just as the diversity of our landscapes, climate, fauna and flora are interconnected and support each other, so too are different groups of people interdependent and enriched by each other.

Relationships of diversity can bloom into community cohesion, creating a sense of belonging for all and care for our neighbours. It will help us see more fully the beauty of diversity that God has created. ¶

*Words: Hannah Ling, Social Justice Adviser  
Photo: Shutterstock*



For more than two years, every week a church in Oxford has opened its doors to refugees. Read about the Ukrainian Friendship Centre: [oxford.anglican.org/friendship-centre](https://oxford.anglican.org/friendship-centre)



Once a year, Bishop Steven chooses a new passage from the Bible for us to focus on. This year it is Ephesians 1.3–14 and 3.14–21. St Paul's words in Ephesians' first chapter get to the heart of our faith.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup> just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. <sup>5</sup> He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace <sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, <sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

<sup>11</sup> In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, <sup>12</sup> so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; <sup>14</sup> this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

# Dwelling in the Word

Every Bishop's staff meeting, and some PCC meetings, begin with people reflecting on these verses from the Bible and sharing their thoughts. The Revd Paul Walker explores a connection between the passage and our theme of social justice and action.

Some years ago I had the privilege to support people in a soup kitchen in Bristol. As I turned up for the evening shift, I remember the smell of a hearty meal that others had lovingly prepared for hours before I arrived. I put my apron on and was tasked with serving the meat dish to those who came for food and friendship.

The doors opened, the people came in and, as I served each one, I remember hearing the incessant "thank you" as I placed a piece of chicken on each plate. As time went on, I realised that the desire to feel appreciated could easily be a significant motivator for me when serving people. I felt guilty for having those feelings as I looked around me and saw others scrubbing pans. I wondered if I would be as happy swapping roles with them. I learned that day that the motivation for serving others, be it from compassion, a need to feel appreciated, guilt, duty, praise, or love, can easily become the primary reason for what we do.

The Bible is full of examples of social justice and action. In the Old Testament we read how the law provided support for widows, foreigners and orphans. In the New Testament, we see how Jesus and his friends came to serve the needs of the sick, the destitute and the rejected too. Yet, as Jesus did this, he not only met people's material needs, but drew attention to their spiritual needs as well.

As I read Ephesians 1.3–14, I was struck by just how amazing God's love and grace is, and how, through Jesus' death and resurrection we have been saved, adopted as God's children, and have received an inheritance that is both for now and

the future. Surely that is a good reason not only to praise God, but to eagerly share the good news with others! How could this speak to my musings about serving at the soup kitchen?

While a desire to serve can come from many places, if born out of gratitude to and praise of God, how much more life-giving this will be. For us and those we meet, we receive an outpouring of love from God that flows through us and into the hearts of others. I realised that it wasn't just about each spoonful of food I put onto a plate. Of greater importance was the agape, the selfless love I could demonstrate by being alongside those there – something All Saints, Dedworth are doing in the new Vine and Fig café!

The thanks I received that day were merely the beginning of relationships that God grew between me and the many people I met. As I got to know others and spent time listening and talking with them, people were so open to hearing about Jesus. While the meals were a means to an end, the relationships we all invested in were simply life-giving.

For both those who served and those who were served, we learned a new dependence upon Jesus, as the Holy Spirit worked in and through us, and helped us all to grow further in faith. ¶



Download copies of the passage and our help sheet for your small group:

[oxford.anglican.org/dwelling-in-the-word](https://oxford.anglican.org/dwelling-in-the-word)

## Not like Us

*"... the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."*

*1 Samuel 16:7*

Heavenly Father,

We are rightly angered and saddened when we see discrimination based on the colour of a person's skin.

Lord, help us to be honest with ourselves and to recognise that discrimination can take many forms. We pray for those from different religious and cultural backgrounds to ourselves. Forgive us, Lord, when we pass judgement on anyone who is not like us, in whatever way, because of their background.

We pray for many in the UK today who feel isolated and excluded from society. We know these are precisely the people that your son Jesus sought out to help. Help us to strive for social justice and the end of all forms of cultural and ethnic prejudice.

We know, Lord, that you look at the heart, not the outward appearance. Help us, like you, to look at the heart and to love everyone, especially those who are not like us.

Amen



What do you think God is calling you to do in your community? See our website for help with tackling social justice issues: [oxford.anglican.org/environment-and-social-justice](https://oxford.anglican.org/environment-and-social-justice)

*Prayer: The Revd Robert Gooding  
Photo: Shutterstock*

# A rural community helped me to connect with God



Brought up on a small dairy farm in rural Buckinghamshire, Sue's idea of heaven was to climb hay bales, ride tractors, shampoo show cattle,

ride bareback through the fields, and love and care for her pony, Tinto.

In Sue's childhood her mother had an encounter with Jesus following a bout of illness, and was in hot pursuit of a life of faith.

As a young agricultural student, Sue's mother had attended a working party at Lee Abbey, a Christian holiday centre in north Devon, and she was keen to revisit and grow her faith. This began a series of summer holiday trips for Sue too. It felt like a yearly pilgrimage.

It was on one of these visits that Sue watched, and was deeply moved by, the young Christian community who worked on the farm, in the kitchen, in the house. They came from across the globe and lived and worked together around a Rule of Life.

Sue recalls seeing the faith of these young people and their passion for serving God. In that rural setting she felt a deep connection within her to a God who creates and sustains. Sue wanted to

know this God and this Jesus. One evening, as a handful of community and guests stood around a small fire in a field, Sue gave her life to Jesus. She held tightly to the words of a song that they had sung on her visits, taken from Matthew 10.8: "freely, freely you have received, freely, freely give..."

Sue joined the Lee Abbey Community at 18 years old, and then again with her young family in 1999, supporting her husband Jason in the role of farm manager.

Now a Pioneer Curate, Sue feels that she has come full circle in many ways, but with a deeper appreciation of God's heart for rural places – for people of the land and seasons. "Rural life is more impacted by family, community and their shared stories. As a church leader, you must be deeply engaged with the people. Key life-changing moments such as funerals, baptisms and weddings are eventful and always fruitful engagements. I always remind myself that Pope Francis urged that priests be 'shepherds with the "smell of the sheep,"' grounded in the situation of their flock."

Sue's journey of faith has led her to believe that God is already at work in the communities people inhabit. "My job as a church leader is to remind 'our sheep' that they are a part of God's story. They are part of the story of the journey home." ¶

*As told to Pathways by the Revd Sue Hughes.*



Rural ministry is changing to meet the needs of the modern world. Listen to Bishop Gavin sharing what pioneers like Sue, and others, are achieving.



# COME AND SEE

## **Answering deep questions of faith**

Come and See returns for Lent 2025. It's our big open invitation to ask deep questions of faith. Join us.

**[oxford.anglican.org/come-and-see](https://oxford.anglican.org/come-and-see)**