

The St John's Messenger

Come to faith, grow in faith, and live out faith
– News from St John the Baptist, Grove



THE VISION GROWS!

Coming to, growing in, and living out faith in Jesus is the foundation of our vision at St John's for this next phase in our church's life. Three inextricably interlinked aspects of faith – like walking a labyrinth. Labyrinths have aided Christian prayer for over 1800 years. I walked one on our Ascensiontide prayer day. Standing ready to step in reminds me of that first step of trust in Jesus – the Way into Life in all its fullness. Facing the centre with its promise of peace,



I feel the weight of a stone in my hand. A left turn and a couple of twists and I am now at the outer edge. This route is full of change and anything but direct. In fact, it's hard to believe it leads anywhere. And then it does. I reach the centre, leave my stone at the foot of the cross and rest.

Heading out feels different, lighter. The twists and turns remain but I have been this way before. In our Christian walk we come to faith with that first step of trust. We grow in faith through prayer, Bible study, conversation. We live out that faith in our lives. Which builds confidence but brings questions, challenges. Our return to prayer, Bible, conversation is at a richer, deeper level.

Supporting this spiral of faith is our vision. The areas of focus within this framework will be developed over the coming months. Speak to a PCC member to know more, or to contribute to the conversation. - Sarah Shackleton

Lord God, fill us with the Spirit of Jesus, that we may be a Christ centred church, growing in numbers, faith, fellowship and mature godliness. Help us to share His hope for our hurting world and His love for all creation. Grant that we may take an active part in building a flourishing and inclusive community in Grove. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Benefice Sunday Services in June

Sunday 7 June

8:00 AM BCP Communion, Grove
9:30 AM Parish Eucharist, Hanney
10:00 AM Holy Communion, Denchworth
10:15 AM Holy Communion, Grove
11:00 AM Parish Eucharist, Challow

Sunday 14 June

8:00 AM BCP Communion, Grove
9:30 AM Parish Eucharist, Hanney
10:00 AM Holy Communion, Denchworth
10:15 AM Morning Worship, Grove
11:00 AM Parish Eucharist, Challow

Sunday 21 June

8:00 AM BCP Communion, Grove
9:30 AM Parish Eucharist, Hanney
9:00 AM Holy Communion, Denchworth
10:15 AM Holy Communion, Grove
11:00 AM Parish Eucharist, Challow

Sunday 28 June

8:00 AM BCP Communion, Grove
10:15 AM St John's Church
Patronal Festival, Grove

Livestream access to the St John's 10:15 AM service can be found on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLjvzip6GG1TzWUBwTu5KJtNQFKCfrAu0j>



ST JOHN'S ENVIRONMENT GROUP

The Environment Group, a sub-committee of the PCC, has been considering and acting on environmental issues relevant to our church for many years. Outcomes are often implemented by other church groups as, for example, insulating the church hall as part of the hall improvement or installing energy efficient light bulbs as part of routine building maintenance.

The Group considers the big environmental issues facing us today, like **Biodiversity Loss** as described by Martin Hodson in the first (April 2026) issue of *The Messenger*. Some of the results are that areas of the church grounds are left 'wild' to encourage biodiversity, dangerous trees have been replaced with a wildlife hedge and a nature trail for prayer/wellbeing was cut in the grass next to St John's Rooms. There is much more we can do for biodiversity as a church and as individuals – see Eco Tip in this and the April edition for ideas – like encouraging insect pollinators and providing suitable habitats.



Another big issue the group continues to consider is **Climate Change**. Our church has taken up the challenge set by the Diocese of Oxford and the Church General Synod, to reach Net Zero carbon across our parish. This recognises the climate emergency and the necessity of a strong, visible Christian response to what is happening to our world. The Church of England aim is to reach Net Zero by 2030; our parish has set a more realistic target of 2035. Again, there are many things we can do as a church, like installing solar panels on the church hall roof, but also actions we can take as members of the church family, such as buying energy efficient appliances when it is time to replace our white goods.

Environmental pollution from various sources involving chemicals from household waste (landfills), industry or agriculture has been well known for a long time, but recently a new pollutant has been identified: **Microplastics** (plastic pieces under five millimetres long), as described by Thomas Jones in his article for the May edition of *The Messenger*. Plastic has a role in almost every aspect of our lives, but there is mounting concern about its environmental impact. Discarded plastics contaminate vital ecosystems and can enter the food chains we rely on. As a church, we reduce the use of single-use plastics by refilling bottles for washing up liquid, hand disinfectant and hand soap.

In the April issue, Martin quoted Psalm 24: 'The Earth is the Lord's and everything in it'. Scientists try to consider the earth as a whole and have created a framework, 'Planetary Boundaries' to assess the rising risks from human pressure on nine critical global processes. Climate Change and the Biosphere are two increasing risks 'outside the safe boundaries'. However, there is some good news: another process, **Stratospheric Ozone Depletion** [Ozone high in the atmosphere which protects life on Earth from incoming ultraviolet radiation] is now 'in the Safe Operating Space' due to the international phasing-out of ozone-depleting substances, in fridges and elsewhere, since the late 1980s.

The PCC, through the Environment Group, is considering how we can contribute further to positive stories like the above. One possible route is through the church family signing up to the A Rocha UK's **Eco Church** programme (<https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/>) – see next issue of *The Messenger*.

- Chris Franklin

CORNERSTONE – 30 YEARS OF CHRISTIAN WITNESS IN GROVE

Cornerstone was established 30 years ago as a joint venture by four local churches (St John's, Grove Methodist, Grove Free Evangelical and Vale Elim). Cornerstone's mission is to be a place where all are welcomed and valued for who they are, not for what they can do and where God is glorified in their dealings with one another.

Cornerstone is a registered charity led by a Board of Trustees from the four churches. Sarah manages the shop and Gilda oversees the kitchen team. Volunteers handle all other tasks such as serving, cleaning, and running the till. Volunteers come from diverse backgrounds, including those gaining work experience or supported placements. If you can spare a few hours during the week or Saturday, please consider volunteering.

Cornerstone is more than a café - it's an award-winning Christian bookshop offering Bibles, reading notes, children's books, and non-fiction titles on topics like marriage, parenting, depression, and spiritual growth. Cornerstone regularly promote new books and can order items for you. Other products include greetings cards, fairtrade goods, and gifts. Cornerstone hosts craft sessions, games, fellowship events, and 'Make and Bake' for under 5's every Tuesday morning during term time. Catering services are available for parties, meetings, funerals, and whole cakes can be ordered.



Cornerstone is a not-for-profit organisation committed to serving the community by keeping prices affordable so everyone can enjoy its food, cards, books and gifts. The café aims to pay staff fairly, provide a warm welcome, and support volunteers, including those with additional needs. Wherever possible, Cornerstone also sources high-quality local and fair-trade products.

To continue this work, Cornerstone relies on donations as well as café profits. Regular monthly donations are especially valuable, helping provide financial stability, support future planning, and demonstrate strong community backing when applying for funding from churches and other organisations.

A marble donation jar also helps fund free meal vouchers for people referred by local schools, the day centre and the advice centre. In the first quarter of 2026 alone, Cornerstone provided meals for at least 60 individuals and families.



Looking ahead, Cornerstone plans to hold an Auction of Promises this summer. Anyone with a skill, service or passion to offer is encouraged to get involved. Offers will be advertised for sealed bids, with winners announced at a special event in September. Cornerstone is open, serving breakfast and lunch, from 9.30 until 2 Monday to Friday and 10-2 on Saturdays. Drinks and cakes are served until 4 on weekdays and 3 on Saturdays. To find out more see the website www.cornerstonegrove.org.uk, follow on Facebook or speak to one of the St John's Trustees – **Miranda Hawkins, Matthew Morgan or Celia Terrill.**

PATHFINDERS AND YOUTH GROUP



Pathfinders is the group that takes place during the morning service for Secondary School aged children. We start with a hot chocolate, with whipped cream and marshmallows... We enjoy some biscuits together whilst we read and discuss the Bible passage. We then turn our thoughts into art.

Youth Group consists of school years 8-13. We start with biscuits and a board game, then grab a Bible to discuss living life with God. Currently, we're exploring each of the 10 Commandments and the Old Testament.



Youth Group and Pathfinders recently went bowling in Oxford. It was great fun and everyone is keen for more trips out!

REPORT OF THE ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING

The Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM) was held on Saturday 16 June, beginning with refreshments and an opportunity to view reports from church groups and hall users. These reports are available online at <https://www.groveparishchurch.org.uk/2026-apcm-documents/>.

The meeting opened with the Annual Vestry Meeting. Minutes from 2025 were approved, and Colin Moulds and Sue Parnell were elected as churchwardens. Thanks were expressed to Nick Terrill, stepping down after six years, and to Colin for continuing in post.

The APCM then formally began, with last year's minutes agreed following a minor amendment.

Revd Alec Gill and Revd Miriam Jones then shared reflections on the church's direction, shaped by PCC discussions and a parish profile review. A new mission statement was introduced:

"St John's Church is a community where people come to, grow in, and live out faith in Jesus Christ within Grove and beyond."

Current priorities include a renewed focus on prayer, particularly during the ten days from Ascension to Pentecost, alongside a parish survey (open until Trinity Sunday) to inform future plans. The PCC will revisit long-term vision strategy in the autumn.

In his Annual Report, Alec highlighted strong community engagement. PCC meetings continue regularly, supported by sub-committees. Attendance has grown at both Sunday services, and recent worship events have been well received. The appointment of Miriam was noted, along with contributions from visiting clergy and volunteers. Thanks were also given to Sarah Shackleton for leading Messy Church and to all involved in events, outreach, and school partnerships.

Chris Gray reported an increase of 13 names on the Electoral Roll, bringing the total to 135, with 40% living outside the parish. This reflects growing attendance and raises opportunities for wider engagement.

All nominated PCC members were elected, alongside co-opted members including the Safeguarding Officer and outgoing Treasurer. Deanery Synod representatives Sarah Shackleton and Johanna Fadipe were re-elected, with one vacancy remaining.

John Harris on behalf of the Site Management Team reported on major works, notably installation of a new boiler and improvements to the curate's house.

The Treasurer outlined a stable financial position, supported by last year's Gift Day and fundraising efforts. However, giving to mission remains at 5%, and increased regular giving is encouraged, ideally through the Parish Giving Scheme. The accounts and mission grants were approved.

After ten years of service, Frank Parnell stepped down as Treasurer. Anna Beck takes on the role, supported by Benita Hiley as bookkeeper.

Deanery Synod continues to meet three times annually, with positive financial collaboration across the deanery and new initiatives supporting local care homes.

The meeting concluded with a mission update, confirming continued support for existing partners and plans for a harvest charity focus during the year. Proceedings closed with prayer.

For full details, members are encouraged to consult the published reports online. - **Sue Parnell**

Get Involved at St John's

- **Share your views** – Complete the parish survey before Trinity Sunday to help shape our future direction. <https://tinyurl.com/ycy4fvjm>
- **Join in prayer** – Take part in the Ascension to Pentecost prayer events, including services, online prayer and the parish walk.
- **Support our mission** – Consider regular giving through the Parish Giving Scheme to help grow our mission impact.
- **Volunteer your time** – Explore opportunities to serve, including Deanery Synod or local care home initiatives.
- **Stay connected** – Join worship, events, and outreach activities across the church community.

“FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS” - WHO IS THE NEW ARCHBISHOP?

If you watched the installation of Sarah Mullally you'd have noticed a couple of occasions when the magnitude of what she was taking on almost overcame her. Not so much that she was the first woman to be Archbishop of Canterbury, but more that she had been called to be shepherd to an huge broken and divided family. I suspect, like many leaders in the Bible, she felt, "Who am I to be entrusted with this?" She made her commitment to Christ aged 16. She's dyslexic, went to comprehensive school, Sixth Form college and polytechnic, and then began a career in nursing, specialising in cancer care - not your classic archbishop CV!



But maybe even then God was preparing her for this time, as she was spotted by the government in 1999 and appointed as the country's Chief Nursing Officer. She was 37, married, mother of two and training for ordination in the evenings. In 2004 she resigned her well-paid post, and went through the normal curate, vicar/rector route. From there she went to a cathedral job, and then became an area bishop in Devon. Next she was appointed Bishop of London. And there she might have remained until retirement in six years' time. However she was called to be

the Archbishop not only of the Church of England but first among Anglican churches worldwide. That calling is more than daunting - nearly 600 churches in England do not accept women in leadership; 12 archbishops from other countries boycotted her installation. Her predecessor, Justin Welby, resigned for the sake of the Church.

Last October after she'd been announced as the new Archbishop, she visited a local church and helped pack food parcels. She then addressed Canterbury Cathedral staff: "Today as I respond to the call of Christ in this new ministry, I remain rooted in my first calling, to follow Christ, to know him and to make him known in the world. In the apparent chaos which surrounds us, in the midst of such profound global uncertainty, the possibility of healing lies in acts of kindness and love. With humility and grace we uphold and support those in need of our help. We do this to the best of our ability, in small ways and big, according to our own very particular gifts. That too is the service which I offer the church today." Not a bad mission statement at such a time as this! - **Michael Wenham**

Eco Tip

If you have an outside house wall (or garden wall, fence or post), you could create a solitary bee (pollinator) home by drilling holes in a piece of wood. Don't forget to sand-paper off any rough edges to the holes. Or you could put up a bird box.

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NEWS FROM ST JOHN'S

ST JOHN'S DIARY OF EVENTS

St John's Toddler Group – Wednesdays in term time – 9.15am – 11am – Hall

BoW (Badminton on Wednesdays) – Every Wednesday – 2pm – 4pm – Hall

Thursday Bible Group – Bi-weekly (not August & December) Thursdays – 2pm – 3.30pm – Lower Room

Thursday Badminton – Every Thursday – 8pm – 9.30pm – Hall

Friends on Friday – Monthly (not August) - 1st & 3rd Fridays – 2pm – 3.30pm – Hall, (3rd Fridays is a Holy Communion)

Church Sunday Club – Run on the 1st, 3rd, and 4th Sundays of each month during term time in the hall or in the St John's Rooms
Sunday Club Social – Run on the 2nd and 5th Sundays, and during school holidays. Activities in the hall, children must be accompanied by an adult.

Board Games Afternoon – Monthly (not August & December) – Sunday 21st June – 2pm – 5pm – Hall

Craft & Fellowship Afternoon – Monthly – 4th Sundays – 2.15pm – 4.30pm – Hall

St John's Senior Youth Group – Sundays during term time – 6.30pm – 8pm – Hall

(on Sundays where there is a Boardgames event in the hall, Youth Group starts at 7pm)

Grove & Wantage School Prayers – 3 times a year – Wednesdays – 4pm – 5pm – Lower Room

(once a school term = late September, January and April).

Saturday Morning Prayers – Every Saturday – 8.30am – Frances Gillott's house, Grove (2nd Saturday at Cornerstone as Prayer Breakfast)

Newsletter Article Ideas

The new newsletter layout allows us to delve deeper into the various activities we engage in at St John's. Here are some ideas: My Spiritual Journey, Book Reviews, Sub-Committee Updates, PCC Update, School Outreach, Explanation of Church Services (e.g. Christingle), Church Group Updates, Mission Partners, Church and Community, Interviews with Church Members. If you have an article idea, please contact news@valebenefice.org.uk to discuss. Articles should be between 400 and 500 words, possibly including a picture.

Additional Benefice Services in May

Wednesday 3 June

10:00 AM Holy Communion, Grove

Thursday 4 June

10:00 AM Holy Communion, Challow

Thursday 11 June

10:00 AM Holy Communion, Challow

Thursday 18 June

10:00 AM Holy Communion, Challow

Friday 19 June

2.00 PM Friends on Friday Holy Communion, Grove

Thursday 25 June

10:00 AM Holy Communion, Challow

St John's Summer Clean

Saturday 20 June 9.30am - 12.30pm

Please sign up on the sheet in the Church entrance hall if you can help with the Summer Clean on Sat 20 June for an hour. Although we have paid cleaners to clean both buildings weekly, they do not deep clean the kitchen cupboards, etc., or clean windows; therefore, we rely on volunteers to help with this once a year.

Jobs will include deep cleaning cupboards & defrosting & cleaning the fridges in both kitchens, cleaning low-level windows & removing low-level cobwebs. Coffee/tea & cake will be served! Please contact Margaret Harris for more details. Thank you for your help.



Cornerstone AGM is on Tuesday 9 June 2026. Refreshments served from 7pm for a 7:30pm start. Come find out what Cornerstone is doing in the local community.

St John's Church Fete - 11 July 2026

We need someone to coordinate paper plate distribution and encourage cake-making for the Fete. Volunteers are needed for stalls, including a raffle, tombola, and refreshments. Donations of toys, games, toiletries, raffle prizes, and nearly new gifts are also needed. Please take these to St John's Rooms. Sign up in the foyer or contact Nicky Gibbard at

Nicky.Gibbard@valebenefice.org.uk

Items offered for Free

Adult folding bicycle and carrying case plus assembly instructions and would dearly like this to be donated. It needs oiling and tyres inflated!



Contact Ann Summers

- summersannmarie@yahoo.com



Thank you so much for support during my journey to the 2026 London Marathon. On 26 April, I took on the challenge on one of the hottest marathon days in recent years, and I'm proud to say I crossed the finish line.

Thanks to your generosity, encouragement, and donations, **over £5,400** has been raised for **Marie Curie**. This amazing total is enough to provide approximately 235 hours of expert nursing care for people living with terminal illness in the comfort of their own homes.

Your support helped me through every mile and will now help families facing incredibly difficult times receive compassionate care when they need it most. I'm truly grateful to everyone who donated, shared messages of encouragement, or cheered me on along the way.

Thank you again for making this achievement and contribution possible.

- **Chris O'Neil**



Wantage & Grove Church Partnership are having their AGM at Grove Methodist church on Sunday 14 June at 4pm

Contacts

Vicar: Revd Alec Gill
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Associate Vicar: Revd Miriam Jones
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Licensed Lay Minister: Sarah Shackleton
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SarahLLM@valebenefice.org.uk

Benefice Office: Grove Parish Church, Main Street, Grove, OX12 7LQ

Open: Mon–Fri. 10–12 noon.

01235 771479.

office@valebenefice.org.uk/

Useful email addresses

news@valebenefice.org.uk - Ideas for articles, news items or even if you have feedback

prayer@valebenefice.org.uk - If you have any prayer requests, please send them to the above email address. There is a group that meets regularly to pray together for those requests in confidence.

QuestionsOfFaith@valebenefice.org.uk - for any questions relating to faith, big or small. These are treated in confidence by our clergy team, only.

itsupport@valebenefice.org.uk - for any questions relating to St John's related IT issues

DP_Team@valebenefice.org.uk - for any data protection issues you might have