

## 'TOWARDS A JOYFUL FUTURE' LEARNING FROM MURMURATIONS



**Written by Revd. Neil Cook**  
*Team Rector of Church Wigan*

Dear brothers and sisters,

Everywhere we look it is clear we live in strange and unsettling times. By faith we know that God is working out his purposes. We see encouraging signs of this here in Wigan, such as growing unity among the churches and young enquirers turning up to explore faith. In all our parishes there has been beautiful creativity in mission resulting in growth over the last two years that has bucked national trends.

At the same time, things aren't like they used to be. Thanks to our wonderful volunteers, lay leaders and clergy we still do great things. But we have less people and money now, and many are tired. The feeling is, we're spinning too many plates. It's also apparent that we can't force our way back into flourishing by simply working harder or relying on the tried and tested methods of the past. We've all been asking, what can we do?

**And then, this summer, God spoke to us.  
The word was 'murmuration'.**

A murmuration is the jaw-dropping spectacle performed by starlings. As dusk approaches, thousands of birds move together in swirling, shifting patterns. It's mysterious, mesmerising and beautiful. Watching a video of a murmuration, one of our clergy exclaimed, 'This is worship!'

And God appeared to say to us, 'I have a plan for you, one to prosper you and give you hope and a future. But it is my plan, not yours. Like starlings taking to the wing to join others and become the murmuration, your role is to join in with the things I reveal to you.'

We realised that our future sustainability will not be secured by our brilliant strategies and working ever harder, but by discerning God's priorities for us, season by season, and embodying these in wise planning. We call this joyful obedience, an attitude to ministry that doesn't try to keep everything going at all costs but does the thing God highlights using the resources freely available to us. It's about spinning less plates and moving toward a future which is less anxious and more joyful.

This long journey towards a joyful future has started with listening: to God and each other. After much listening, this autumn our PCCs will agree on the priorities that, in faith, they believe the Spirit is showing them. Then, over the following months, clear plans will be formulated to embody these priorities, using the resources God has already given to us. We will do what we can, not what we can't, trusting God to provide.

**Your PCC will keep you informed of what's happening. In the meantime, keep praying for a joyful future where God's will is done 'in Wigan as in heaven.'**

For the full Church Wigan Organisational Wellbeing report, a video from Neil about the image of a murmuration and the four page 'Joyful Future' document, scan the QR code or visit...

[www.churchwigan.org/joyfulfuture](http://www.churchwigan.org/joyfulfuture)



## The Well - Dates & Speakers

**This November, we will be joined at The Well by Bishop Ruth Worsley!**

Come and hear the Bishop of Wigan teach on hearing the Holy Spirit for mission and join in a night of worship, inspiration, and fellowship you won't want to miss!

Please note - November's Well service will be on the **second Sunday of the month** (see dates below).

**Join us live on Facebook from 7pm, or watch later on YouTube.**

**9th November 2025 (7pm)** - Ruth Worsley, Bishop of Wigan  
(Second Sunday of the Month)

**7th December 2025 (7pm)** - Kevin & Anne Roberts, ReSource  
(First Sunday of the Month)



## £220,000 in Debt Cleared!

Over the past 2 years, our Christians Against Poverty (CAP) Debt Centre team, led by our 'Debt Coach' Christiane Cook, have worked closely with individuals and families across Wigan to release them from debt and lift them out of poverty.

The team have now hit an incredible milestone of £220,000 debt cleared!

**If you would like to talk about how to get involved with the team or if you yourself are struggling with debt, please contact [christiane.cook@wigandeanerytrust.org](mailto:christiane.cook@wigandeanerytrust.org)**



Christiane & the CAP Befriender Team

## Next Gen Sleepover

The Next Gen Team invite all 11-16 year olds to an unforgettable sleepover at St Thomas' Church, Ashton-in-Makerfield on Thursday, 14th November!

Expect fun games, snacks, laughter and great company all night long!

Grab your sleeping bag, bring your friends, and get ready for a night to remember!

**For more info, contact the Dan on Next Gen Team - [dan.munro@wigandeanerytrust.org](mailto:dan.munro@wigandeanerytrust.org).**

## Last Night of the Proms

This September, St Michael and all Angels Church raised a whopping £1,795 for charity at their 'Last Night at the Proms' concert, featuring the Pemberton Old Wigan DW Championship Band! Congratulations to all involved! See below for more information about upcoming events at St Michaels.

### Dates for Your Diary

St Michael's has a busy December ahead! 'Elvis & Friends' kick things off on 5th December (tickets £10), followed by the Community Choir on 10th raising money for charity. The 'Really Awful Orchestra' (who are anything but!) perform on 12th, and the Wigan Choral Society presents Handel's Messiah soon after. More festive events are planned—see the back page for details.

## Arise - Youth Worship

Arise is a creative and fun space for youth to connect, learn, worship and share stories of God at work. All young people, between the ages of 11 to 17 are welcome! Come along for activities, games, pizza and many more exciting things.

The next 'Arise' gathering is on Sunday 30th of November, 4:30pm-6pm at St Mark's Church, Newtown.

**For more information, check out the Church Wigan Next Generation Facebook page or contact [aisha.whittington@wigandeanerytrust.org](mailto:aisha.whittington@wigandeanerytrust.org)**



Talks from the Well are available to watch on the Church Wigan YouTube Channel. Scan the QR code, or search 'Church Wigan' on YouTube for more information.

## Remembrance Service

This year's Remembrance service at Wigan Parish Church will be held at 11am on Sunday 9th November. The Mayor's procession will start from the Town Hall on Library Street, at 10:15am.

## Faith and Feast!

On Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> October, a brand new Worshipping Community was launched - Faith & Feast - at Rectory Primary School, Downall Green. Led by Stuart Barton-Ainsworth and a team from Holy Trinity, the first session was a roaring success, with a total of 61 children, adults, staff and team members in attendance! Check out the Holy Trinity Church Facebook page for updates about upcoming Faith & Feast events.



### LML COMMISSIONING!

We are also excited to say that Stuart will be commissioned as a 'Local Missional Leader' (LML) on **Sunday 7th December at 11am** in Holy Trinity! As an LML, Stuart will have a focus on Church/School partnerships. We met up with Stuart to hear all about his life, faith and journey to commissioning...

...Scan the QR code or visit the website below to watch Stuart's 'My Journey' video!



[www.churchwigan.org/storiesofhope](http://www.churchwigan.org/storiesofhope)



## Next Gen Team Fundraising

Meet Andy, Aisha, Janie and Dan, our amazing Wigan Next Generation team (WiNG). They've been active in high schools, churches and communities, offering leadership training, mentoring, and organised groups to introduce young people to Jesus. Their work brings transformation – from isolation to belonging, depression to hope, and loneliness to community. And they train and support church volunteers in youth work to do the same locally.

We now need funding for two of our team members to continue this important work, enabling young people to grow in Christian faith and turn the tide of the mental health crisis and post Covid Trauma into empowering our young people to realise their full potential.

If you feel able to support this crucial work, please either scan the QR code, or email Christiane Cook at [Christiane.cook@wigandeanerytrust.org](mailto:Christiane.cook@wigandeanerytrust.org)

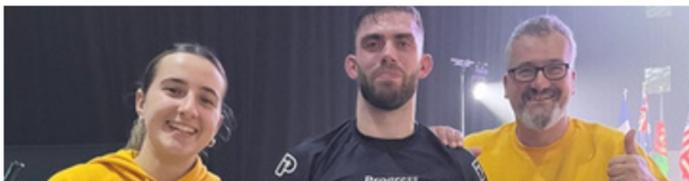


Aisha, Andy, Dan & Janie

## Sports Chaplaincy Update

**Wonderful things are happening in the world of Sports Chaplaincy in Wigan!** Lizzy Cook, one of our Sports Chaplains, shares...

“Church Wigan Sports Chaplaincy focuses on bringing church to the people - to meet the members of the sporting community wherever they are. Through listening, supporting, and believing, we have the vision to see the love of God transform our community, using the massive platform of sport. You'll see us in our gold hoodies wherever we go. We're excited to say that we were able to sponsor the Snakepit World Catch Wrestling Championships, and we also look forward to planning our first community Christmas Carol service at a local training site, Laithwaite Park.”



## Farewell to Revd. Frances

Last month, we said a very fond farewell to Revd. Frances and Steve Shoemsmith as they embarked on their next adventure - retirement! Wigan has been richly blessed through their ministry, leadership, and friendship. Their presence has left a lasting imprint on Church Wigan, and they will be deeply missed by all who have had the privilege of walking alongside them. We pray for God's blessing to be upon them as they start their next journey in Surrey.



If you would like to pass on a message to Frances, to wish her well in her retirement, please email Nicola at: [communications.officer@churchwigan.org](mailto:communications.officer@churchwigan.org)

## Comedy Night with Andy Kind

@ St Thomas' Church, Ashton-in-Makerfield

Come along for an evening of stand-up that's sharp, silly, and seriously fun! Join us for a brilliant night of live comedy, that's sharp, silly, and seriously funny, with award-winning comedian Andy Kind - described as “absolutely terrific” by The Scotsman and “tossing out comic gems” by the Yorkshire Times.

**Thursday 13th November 2025 | 7:30 PM**

St Thomas' Church, Ashton-in-Makerfield, WN4 9PL

Tickets: £10

£8 for students and those on Universal Credit

To book now: Contact Chris Wooff on 01942 724207 or email [comedy@stthomasstluke.org.uk](mailto:comedy@stthomasstluke.org.uk)

Or online: [www.stthomasstluke.org.uk/comedy](http://www.stthomasstluke.org.uk/comedy)

## New Team Members

### Janie Hardman

*Next Gen Scholarship Student*

Janie is the newest member of the Next Generation team! Janie is a scholarship student, learning theology whilst also serving the young people of Wigan through youth groups, after school sessions and lunch clubs. This new venture is exciting and we can't wait to show you what she can bring to the team!



### Adele Hitchen

*Finance Admin Support*

Adele has joined the Wigan Deanery Trust team to support the work of the finance team. With a background in school business management, she brings a wealth of experience and wisdom to the team. It is wonderful to have her on board!



### Nicola Harris

*Communications Officer*

Nic has worked with the Wigan Deanery Trust team since March this year as a funerals administrator, but she has now also taken on the role of Communications Officer further to Dave Sixsmith's retirement this Summer. Feel free to get in contact with any comms queries at: [communications.officer@churchwigan.org](mailto:communications.officer@churchwigan.org)



## 65 Years in Ministry

This September, we celebrated the 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the ordination of Revd. Wendy Williams. Revd. Wendy was originally ordained into the Congregational church (now recognised as the URC church) in 1960 and is now a retired, ordained minister in the Wigan anglican deanery. We thank Wendy for her faithful service throughout her time in ministry.



## CHRISTMAS IS COMING!

Turn over for a Calendar of festive events and information about our pantry opening times over the Christmas period



# Christmas

## ACROSS CHURCH WIGAN 2025

### Christmas Day Lunch

 **25th December | See timings below**  
@St James & St Thomas Church, Poolstock

Service of the Word at 10.30am followed by Christmas Day lunch with all the trimmings, all free and all welcome-booking essential.

Call Revd Alison on 07806 798030 to book your place.

### Christmas Movie Night

 **Saturday 13th December | 5pm**  
@St John's Church, Abram

Bring along the whole family for a Christmas Movie night at St John, Abram.

The cost is £3 per admission ticket. For tickets, please call Jodie on 07544 413164. Book early to avoid disappointment!

### Nativity with a Twist

 **Wednesday 24th December | 10am**  
@St John's Church, Hindley Green

Nativity with a twist - suitable for all ages! Come and see the nativity with fresh eyes!

### Christmas Tree Festival

 **7th December - 4th January**  
@St Peter's Church, Hindley

Apart from church services, the church will be open on the following Saturday afternoons from 12 noon - 4.00 pm for visitors to attend:

13th December; 20th December and 27th December.

### Christmas Carols & Hotpot

 **Tuesday 16th December**  
St Matthew's Church, Highfield

Community Carols with a Brass Band, followed by Hotpot (funded by our local councillors).

### Local Councillors Carol Service

 **Thursday 18th December | 7pm**  
St Paul's Church, Goose Green

Brass Band followed by Hot Pot. Contact Arthur Cooper for more details on 07710 004243.

### Trinity Girls Brass Band Concert

 **Saturday 6th December | 1pm**  
Holy Trinity Church, Downall Green

Tickets: £7 available from [tgb@live.co.uk](mailto:tgb@live.co.uk)

### Carols round the Christmas Tree

 **Friday 19th December | Time TBC**  
Outside the Bowling Green Pub near St Michaels'

Led by Councillor Hunt, this is a popular event for the community of Swinley.

### Christmas Fairs

 **Saturday 22nd November | 11am - 3pm**  
St Thomas' Church, Ashton in Makerfield

 **Saturday 22nd November**  
St Peter's CE School, Hindley

 **Saturday 22nd November | 2pm - 4pm**  
St Francis Church, Kitt Green

 **Saturday 29th November | 11am - 2pm**  
St Andrew's Church, Garswood

 **Saturday 29th November | 1pm - 5pm**  
St Peter's Brigade Hall, Bryn

### Pantry Opening Times Over Christmas

#### The Pantry @ St. Nathaniel's

**Closed** Christmas Day and New Year's Day.

#### The Pantry @ Christ Church

**Closed** Christmas Day and New Year's Day

#### Tom's Pantry

**Open** Monday 22nd Dec 9.30-11.45am

Tuesday 23rd Dec 9.30-11.45am

**Closed** Christmas Eve

**Open** Tues 30th Dec 9.30-11.45am

Wed 31st Dec 9.30-11am

**Closed** Saturday 3rd January

#### Annie's Pantry

**Open** Monday 22nd Dec

**Closed** Monday 29th December

#### Ashton Pantry

**Open** Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve 6-6.30pm

**Closed** Christmas Day and New Year's Day

#### JEDS Pantry

**Open** Tuesday 23rd December

**Closed** Tuesday 30th December

#### The Pantry @ Holy Trinity

**Closed** Boxing Day and 2nd January

#### Aidan's Pantry

**Closed** Boxing Day and 2nd January

Emergency Food will be available throughout.  
Please e-mail [foodprovision@churchwigan.org](mailto:foodprovision@churchwigan.org)

It isn't possible to list here all of the wonderful things that are happening over Christmas, however a comprehensive list will be available soon on the Church Wigan Website.

For a fuller list of events across Church Wigan this December, scan the QR code or visit our website:  
[www.churchwigan.org/christmas](http://www.churchwigan.org/christmas)

