

Newsletter

Bruton

Pitcombe

Redlynch

Brewham

Shepton Montague

Wyke Champflower



The Bishop of Oxford, Rt Rev'd Steven Croft, has become the first Diocesan Bishop of the Church of England to call openly for reform of the Church's law and practice regarding gay marriage. More bishops have now joined his call for change, to enable gay couples both to marry in church and to have their civil partnerships or marriages blessed in church. If this change were made, it is likely that solemnising or blessing a same-sex marriage would be

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Rt Rev'd Steven Croft

a matter of discretion for individual clergy, in the same way as is currently the case for the marriage of those who have been divorced – there would be no legal obligation to conduct the marriage. It is probable that the same call for reform will extend to removing the current requirement for celibacy that currently applies to gay clergy and the ban on clergy marrying a same-sex partner.

Any change would (I believe) require a decision of General Synod and it is not yet clear when (or in what way) this might be on the agenda there. Opponents of any such change are also beginning to speak out against Bishop Steven's proposals.

This development should be seen as a continuation from the 'Living in Love and Faith' project, by which the Church of England has been holding conversations about issues of sexuality, identity, gender and relationships over the last few years, as it seeks to engage with differences of conviction, often strongly held.

When I arrived in this Benefice, I tried to initiate some of these discussions here, in order to discover what attitudes people have here and why, and to see whether there are people who dare not express their views openly, or who feel unwelcome in our churches. Sadly, there was no interest in having any such discussions. If the changes for which Bishop Steven and others are calling do take place, and indeed even if they do not, it will be vitally important that all PCCs have thoughtful, prayerful and respectful discussions about these issues so that together we can work out how we would move forward together in relation to this issue in love and faith. Equally importantly, we should seek to involve those who are not members of any PCC, and perhaps not members of any congregation, to make sure as best we can that all voices are heard.

If you are interested in reading Bishop Steven's explanation of his change of

mind on this issue, he has published an essay entitled 'together in love and faith', which can be bought online for £2.50: <https://store.oxford.anglican.org/product/together-in-love-and-faith>



If you have something to contribute to a future edition of this newsletter, do please send it to the Rector at the benefice office address.

Easy-to-follow details of how to receive this newsletter by email can be found on the St Mary's website, or email benefice@stmarysbruton.org. If you are aware of someone who might like to receive it but does not use email, please consider printing a copy yourself and delivering it to them.

News from our Parishes

St Peter's, Shepton Montague is having some redecoration work done, to treat some mould and do some re-painting. This means that the church will be closed for the duration of the works, which are expected to last for most of November. The Remembrance Sunday service on 13 November will therefore take place in the village hall.

The Rector has attended a meeting of a pilot Local Community Network and also another emerging group in Bruton to consider possible responses to the challenges faced locally by the rising cost of living.

The Film Night series continues at Shepton Montague, with a screening of 'Elvis' on Thursday 10 November, refreshments from 6.45pm, film starts at 7.30 pm. Tickets and drinks are available on the door. NB this time the event will be in the village hall (next door to the church) because of redecoration works at the church.

We continue to pray for Bishop Michael and his family as they settle in to life in this Diocese. Bishop Michael's installation will take place on 12 November

at the cathedral. This is an invitation-only event, but it will be livestreamed via the Diocesan website. Bishop Michael will be coming to meet local clergy at a Deanery Chapter meeting on 1 December.

St Peter's, Redlynch celebrated the harvest in considerable style, with the famous sausage rolls making a welcome re-appearance. Members of the congregation at St Mary's swelled the ranks and the chapel was beautifully decorated.

5th Sunday Events



For the first of our 5th Sunday social events on All Saints Day, we enjoyed an outing to All Saints, Castle Cary for their Patronal Festival and were very warmly welcomed there – not least because David Slater, the organist at St Mary's, very kindly covered the absence of their regular organist. Coffee (or champagne, according to taste) and cake at the George Hotel afterwards ended the morning well.

If you have suggestions for future 5th Sunday events (the next one will be on 29 January), please email benefice@stmarysbruton.org with your ideas. One suggestion already received is a shared breakfast after an 8.00 am BCP Holy Communion service. Any takers?

Benefice Discussion Group

In the discussion groups we have been working our way through the Creed, and have enjoyed some very interesting and encouraging discussions. There is a plan (not yet fully formed) to hold an Advent series of discussion groups, probably running for the 4 Mondays in Advent (beginning on 28 Nov and ending on the

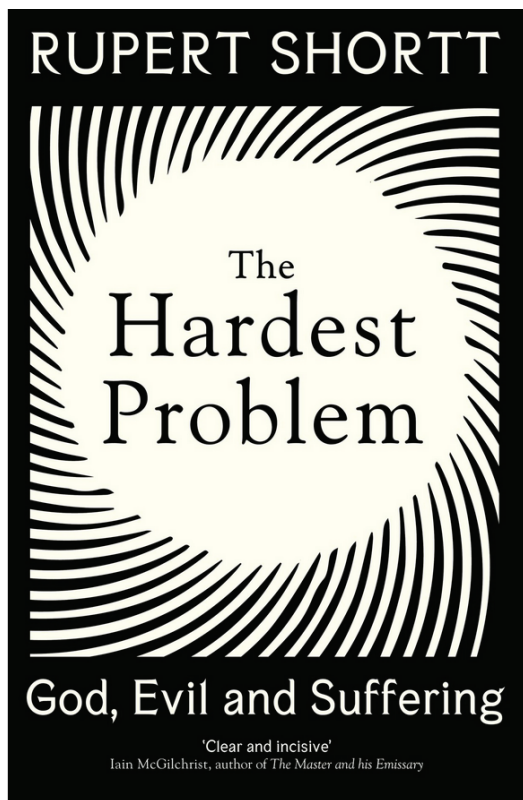
19 Dec). This is likely to be focussed on representations of the Advent Antiphons in painting, music and poetry. Further details will be announced when plans are more certain.

Book Review

Rupert Shortt, 'The Hardest Problem: God, Evil and Suffering'
(Hodder & Staughton, 2022)

This concise book (just over 100 pages) tackles one of the questions that has confronted people of faith across the centuries: how can a supposedly all-powerful and all-loving God permit evil and suffering on such a grand scale? To many, the fact of suffering is conclusive proof that the God of Christianity (and other world religions) is a fake and a figment of human imagination.

Rupert Shortt writes clearly and simply, and he offers us a path through this difficult terrain. He cautions against false certainties, both within the communities of faith and among atheists. He distinguishes between suffering from natural causes and human acts of evil and addresses both. This is a very helpful discussion of this difficult problem, covering topics about prayer and the very nature of God. It is one to be read slowly, but it is worth the effort.



Diocesan Finances

As mentioned before in this Newsletter and elsewhere, the deficit in the Diocesan budget, which is due to falling levels of payment of parish share by the parishes across the Diocese, has resulted in a plan to cut the numbers of stipendiary clergy.

Many people are unhappy about this. Many people have views about the Diocesan budget and ideas about ways in which it could be structured without cutting the numbers of stipendiary clergy. Some of those views and ideas are less than fully informed about how the Diocese gains and spends its money and what goes into the budget.

There are a number of opportunities coming up this month to join in an online discussion of the financial challenges that face us, both at parish level and at Diocesan level. Any PCC member who wishes to become more fully informed about these challenges, or has a contribution to offer to the debate, is welcome to participate. Please contact benefice@stmarysbruton.org for details.

Deanery Synod met on 10 November to consider possible ways of reorganising Benefices in the light of the required reduction in stipendiary clergy. None of our Deanery Synod representatives attended the meeting other than the Rector. There will be a meeting of the Diocesan Synod this month (on 26 Nov), but it is not yet known whether this issue will feature significantly on the agenda for that meeting.

What am I living for?

The Heartedge movement is offering a series of lectures entitled 'What am I living for?'. These take place at St Martin in the Fields, London but can also be accessed online (but only as a live event; they are not recorded). There is one on

14 November that is likely to be very good: Rowan Williams speaking on a new heaven and a new earth. The link to watch online is available on the Heartedge website: <https://www.stmartin-in-the-fields.org/whatson-event/what-am-i-living-for-a-new-heaven-and-a-new-earth-livestream/>

Diary Dates

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- 2 November - All Souls Service at St Mary's, 6.30 pm
- 4 November - Pitcombe PCC at Grove Farm, 2.30pm
- 6 November - Baptism at St John's, 9.30 am
- 6 November - St Leonard's Patronal Festal Evensong, 6.00 pm
- 8 November - wedding at St Mary's, 11.00 am
- 10 November - meeting of the Deanery Synod
- 12 November - Bishop Michael's installation (ticket only)
- 14 November - Brewham PCC at Colinshays, 5.00 pm
- 16 November - Bruton PCC at the Benefice Meeting Room at Plox, 5.30 pm
- 26 November - Diocesan Synod
- 27 November - Advent Choral Evensong at St Mary's, 6.00 pm

Further ahead...

- 1 December - 'Late Night Shopping' in Bruton
- 6 December - Shepton Montague PCC at the village hall, 6.30 pm
- 18 December - Carol services at Brewham, Pitcombe and Shepton Montague

- 19 December - Bruton Choral Society carol concert at St Mary's, 7.00 pm
- 21 December - Carol service at Wyke Champflower, 6.30 pm
- 22 December - Carol service at Redlynch, 6.00 pm
- 24 December - village carolling in Shepton Montague, time tbc
- 24 December - Christingle Service at St Mary's, 4.30 pm

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