



50p

St Helen's Church

Ashby-de-la-Zouch

FAITH — LOVE — COMMUNITY



Parish Magazine

April 2026

PARISH DIRECTORY

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St Helen's Church is part of the **Ashby Churches**

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Ashby Congregational	01530 563301
Ashby Methodist Church	01530 412298
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Donations can be left in the boxes at the back of St Helen's Church, in the porch of Holy Trinity or the Congregational Church, or at any of Ashby's Co-ops. Thank you to everyone for the continued support.



FROM THE MINISTRY TEAM

Dear Friends,

I am writing this on the 25th of March, the day when the church celebrates the Feast of the Annunciation, marking the appearance of the Angel Gabriel to Mary, announcing to her that she is to be the mother of Jesus the Son of God. History tells us that the date for the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25th, was established by early Church tradition and theologians—around the 3rd or 4th century—to coincide with the spring equinox and exactly nine months before Christmas. When the date occurred during Lent (as it does for us this year), it was marked as a day of celebration, and so Lenten observances were lifted for that day. It was considered a day for celebration, being the day that marks the time when God made his promise to the world and the Word became flesh.



Today (as I am writing) is also the day which has been chosen for Dame Sarah Mullally to be installed as the 106th Archbishop of Canterbury. The first time a woman has held this office in its 1,400-year history. She will be the spiritual leader of 85 million-strong global Anglican Communion.

Many of us may be familiar with the Magnificat (The song of Mary) a song/hymn/prayer which “emphasizes God's favour for the humble and mercy for those who fear him” and I am sure that this will be present in the ceremony for Dame Sarah today with the themes of praise and humility. A stream of strength for us as we look ahead to the months to come.

What does it mean for us in the Flagstaff family of churches and community to have the first female Archbishop? For our church family and community and Christians all over the country and the world the installation of Dame Sarah comes as we are drawing close to Holy week and many of us will be walking with Jesus from the Hosanas of Palm Sunday to the Agony of the Cross on Good Friday and the joy of the Resurrection on Easter morning. The news of Christ's resurrection should encourage and remind us

of the hopes of new life in Christ, lifting our eyes up and over the horizon.

As we approach Easter can we renew hope. Can we once again open our eyes to the promise of new beginnings. The death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, is victory over death and a promise of ultimate, everlasting protection and eternal life with God. So, there is much for celebration and there is much for all people.

Supermarkets and stores have been full of chocolate eggs, fluffy bunnies and chicks and hot cross buns since Christmas, but it is coming to the time when they should take their place at the forefront of celebration. Eggs have always been used as symbols of new life and hope and early Christians often used eggs to represent the sealed tomb of Jesus, and the act of cracking or breaking the shell symbolized his resurrection. Traditionally, eggs were dyed red to symbolize the blood of Christ shed at the crucifixion.

Easter being in the spring brings with it for all longer days, holiday time, spring flowers and sunshine- and in that a powerful, universal metaphor for new beginnings.

So whatever Easter means/brings for you and for those you know and love- may Easter fill your heart with peace and new beginnings

Lord, we thank you for the promise of new life and the profound hope that Easter brings. Your mercy and grace shine brightly on this and every day, illuminating our lives with the warmth of your love.

Amen

Elizabeth Smith

ASHBY YOUTH FOR CHRIST

If you would like to sign up for regular updates either follow this link <http://eepurl.com/dvVqrj> or email helen.davis@yfc.co.uk. Alternatively you can scan the QR code. Thank you for all your prayers and support.



Thanks to all those who came along to our AGM in March. We had an encouraging turn out of supporters and young people as we heard some good news stories from the 2024/25 year.

On the evening, we were lead in a time of worship by some of our year 10 apprentices who formed a band for the first time. What a blessing! We are hoping to facilitate more opportunities for worship and for them to use their musical gifts during our regular mid-week groups. Please do pray for these times of worship, and that the young people would come to know more of the goodness of God in their own personal time with Him.

We also heard from Danny, one of our year 11 apprentices, about the Christian Union which he has established, with his peers, at Ashby School. The group now has so many people attending regularly at lunchtimes that they ran out of bibles! More have been sourced to help support this fantastic setup of young people engaging in fellowship and studying the Word together during the school day. Please do pray that it would continue to grow in number and that those attending would continue to grow in faith.

At the meeting, Noreen Mewies stepped down as chair of trustees. She will continue to serve on the board, and we are very grateful for all the time she has put into the role to date. AYFC would love to encourage anyone interested to think about joining the council of reference. This is a group of local Christians who commit to meeting roughly twice a year and to praying regularly for the work of AYFC.

Our thanks go out to every church and individual who have supported us over the last year. Your prayers and financial support are truly appreciated.

ASHBY JOY

Ashby JOY is a group of people in their 20s &30s from various local churches, who meet weekly for fellowship and study.

Our group has continued to meet on a weekly basis over the last month, enjoying a combination of socials and time studying the bible. We have been following the 'Practicing the Way' course by John Mark Comer, reading the book and using the video materials to form our times of discussion.

We recently celebrated some birthdays in the group by hosting a sno-tubing social in Swadlincote and enjoyed supporting a quiz in aid of Tearfund at Ashby Baptist Church.

As a regular group of around 10 people, we would still love for more people to join us, either regularly or occasionally. Please do contact myself or the parish office for more information about where and when we are meeting, or to be added to our WhatsApp group.

Please continue to pray for our times together, that we would grow in the depth of our faith and that the JOY community would continue to grow.

Emily Darlington



CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

AWARD SUCCESS

Annabel, our head chorister, was presented with her RSCM bronze award certificate by the Bishop of Leicester. Congratulations Bel– very well deserved!

“On February 2nd, me and mummy made our way over to Lichfield cathedral where the exam was taking place. We got there and went into the cathedral before going to the cathedral school. We met Andrew there and had a few minutes to practice before going into the exam.

I sang 3 pieces, had to do aural tests and had to know about the church. I sang a hymn: ‘Immortal, invisible’ to St Denio's Tune, an anthem: ‘Gaelic Blessing’ by John Rutter and a rendition of Psalm 121.

I was nervous but because I knew the 3 pieces really well I knew I was going to at least pass, and also having Andrew in the room makes it easier. We sang the 3 pieces first and then Andrew left before I sang the sight reading and was asked about a chosen Church Holiday, I chose Christmas as it hadn't been very long since that celebration.”



Annabel Fraser

MESSY CHURCH

Happy Birthday **Messy Church!**

This month we celebrated Messy Church's thirteenth birthday alongside the festival of Candlemass.

One of our 'young leaders' who generously shares her artistic talents with us every month, had attended our very first messy Church as a babe in arms!

We are delighted that our new timing for Messy Church, together with some changes in the format, are encouraging new families to join us and we thank Viscount Beaumont school for all their support.



Messy Church continues to meet monthly, with the next session being held on Friday 8th May. All welcome!

Pat Stafford and team

LOUGHBOROUGH TOWN OF SANCTUARY

Many thanks to St Helen's for all their support of our work at LToS! One aspect of what LToS do is providing opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers to engage in English conversation and learn more about how the UK 'ticks'.

The main 'qualifications' for volunteer group leaders are flexibility and friendliness! Each of us works in our own way, and we don't all have a detailed knowledge of grammatical terminology. It can be fascinating to realise how much we intuitively know about our own language, and to realise how difficult English reading and spelling can be. (It doesn't help that we have to start with the word 'Loughborough'!) We are often joined by volunteer students from the University, which has recently been awarded 'University of Sanctuary' status.

We tend to tackle topical every day subjects and often play games: one volunteer regularly uses his musical skills and incorporates a song! My group recently discussed the things they missed most about their countries of origin and one lady from Iran told us about her climbing exploits on the mountain of Alam-Kuh.

The following week I brought pictures of mountains in the UK: let's just say, when we looked at comparative heights, she was not impressed! However, it did give me the chance to introduce some useful vocabulary and discuss the difference between a 'mountain' and a 'hill'!

In contrast to the frequent representation of refugees as 'lazy scroungers', my current group comprises an engineer, an architect, a dentist, a chef, and an eighteen-year-old who would like to follow her father into engineering. Each of them already speaks at least two languages. They are eager to improve their basic but already reasonably functional level of English so that they can pursue their chosen careers in the UK. They tell me repeatedly and emphatically that 'English people are very kind' and they want to repay the welcome that the UK has offered them.

Refugees need to pass a test when they are eventually allowed to

apply for British citizenship, so we try to weave some relevant facts into our conversations. Incidentally, on a recent family visit, our grandson was asking me about this test and decided we should give it a try. Six of us, all born and bred in England (and holding between us a range of qualifications including GCSEs, an accountancy qualification, two honours degrees, a Masters and a PhD) worked as a team and tried the online sample test.

We failed it! I leave you to judge just how relevant this test is but at LToS, we have to work with the system we've got! You might like to have a go yourselves:

[Life in the UK Test -FREE online Practice Tests & EXAMS 2025](#)

Enjoy!!

Pat Stafford

EXAMEN

During Holy Week, some of the congregation joined together for services of compline (evening prayer). This service includes the 'Examen'- a series of questions to help guide our time of personal prayer and reflection.

Perhaps you'd find it helpful to have them in print here, for use on the bus, or in the dentist's waiting room, during your commute or last thing at night etc etc.....

Reflect on:

- *What are you thankful for today?*
- *Where have you seen God at work today?*
- *What has been difficult today?*
- *Is there anything you would like to say sorry for today?*

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FROM THE ALBUMS

In March, Caroline's choir 'notability' provided us with an evening of musical entertainment.

Donkeys joined us for our annual Palm Sunday procession.



Vernon, from AYFC, joined us for mothering Sunday, giving us much to think about and to be entertained by!



LESSONS IN GRATITUDE

Volunteering with Loughborough Town of Sanctuary has certainly opened up my horizons and made me count my blessings! At the English conversation sessions, we are, of course, very careful not to ask intrusive questions- but naturally, relationships develop and people sometimes want to talk.

So, these days - having listened to their stories: I never put my key in the front door without feeling grateful for the roof over my head; I never snuggle into my bed at night without appreciating its warmth; I never set off for church without thinking of the two Iranian Christians in my current English group, and their gratitude for the freedom they have to worship in their newly adopted church In Loughborough;

And this week I have one more aspect of life in the UK to be thankful for, when I try *not* to worry about the challenges my teenage grandchildren face as they begin to navigate the adult world! Why? Because I think of the 18 year old girl from Iran - also in my group and very keen to improve her English and hopefully build a career here. This week, she told me that when living in Iran, she twice, without her parents' permission, joined her friends on protest marches, taking off her hijab and calling for women's independence. On the second occasion, she was arrested and taken to prison. 'There, they hurt me' was all she said, but her father somehow managed to get her out and take her home. 'So', she explained, 'my parents have brought me here - not because they are afraid for themselves - but because they are afraid for me'.

Pat Stafford

OUR WORSHIP IN APRIL

	am	pm	Wednesday
1st Sunday 5th April	10.30am Holy Communion for Easter Sunday		
2nd Sunday 12th April	10.30am Holy Communion		2nd Wednesday– 8th Holy Communion 10.30am In Church
3rd Sunday 19th April	10.30 am Civic Service		3rd Wednesday– 15th Holy Communion 10.30am In Church
4th Sunday 27th April	10.30 am Holy Communion with Hoveraid		4th Wednesday– 22nd Morning prayer 10.30am In church
			5th Wednesday– 30th Please see weekly notices

Regular activities:

- Monday mornings - Little Fishes 9.30 - 11.30am during term time
- Mondays - Pilgrim group
- 1st & 3rd Wednesday - We're in stitches – 2 till 4pm
- Thursdays - Choir practice – 6.30 till 8.30pm
- Fridays - Heart- warming Space 2-4pm
- Saturdays - Parish Prayers – 9.30am in the Hastings chapel
- 1st Saturday - Pause for Paws

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Sunday 19th April– Civic Service held at St Helens

Tuesday 21st April– St Helen’s APCM— 7pm

Anyone on the Electoral Roll is warmly invited to attend our Annual Parochial Church Meeting. We will be reflecting on the life of our church community over the 2024/25 year, thinking about our vision statement and hearing updates about current building issues and ideas.

Sunday 26th April– **10.30am** -Holy Communion with guest speaker from Hoveraid, followed by fellowship lunch. During the lunch we will enjoy a presentation about Hoveraid’s most recent work in Madagascar. See weekly notices for lunch information.

Saturday 2nd until Monday 4th May- ‘Made By Me’ exhibition- See poster.

Sunday 3rd May– Soiree– Organ recital– 6-8pm

Join us again for evensong, followed by refreshments and an organ recital by Chris Ouvry-Johns– Director of Music at Leicester Cathedral.

Monday 4th May– Lunchtime Recital– 12.20pm

Anna Haines and Andrew Chapman will give a short recital of music to end the exhibition weekend. Admission free, donations welcomed.

Friday 8th May– Messy Church– 4.15-5.30pm in the Heritage Centre

Activities for all ages to learn, play and worship together. Including creative crafts, stories, songs and refreshments.

EASTER PRAYERS AND BEYOND

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

These are the desperate words of Jesus on the cross. It requires a strong voice to say them with sufficient intent. It's a quote from Psalm 22. Jesus says the first line, but he would have been referring to the whole psalm. Let's look at the first few verses. Warning – they are incredibly bleak, but God likes to hear your inner feelings.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me,
From the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.

Later on verses 12 to 21 describe the dread attack as it approaches. There are bulls, a roaring lion, dogs, a company of evildoers, the horns of the wild oxen, and the dust of death! Brilliantly metaphorical as it conveys deep fear and hopelessness. For myself, I've had some bad times but none quite like this.

Then the tables are turned, and hope and praise suddenly appear. My favourite line is verse 27, and I use this as the foundation to all my prayers:

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord.

Christians down the ages have reflected the stark loneliness of Jesus on the cross in their own prayers, as given below.

Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430 AD)

O Lord Jesus Christ,
you were crucified for us in time,
yet you are eternal with the Father.
You took upon yourself what was ours,
that you might give us what is yours.
You suffered death, though you are Life itself;
you were forsaken, that we might never be forsaken.
Let my heart cling to your cross,
and let me not seek to come down from it,
but to share in your suffering,
that I may also share in your glory.

Amen.

After searching for some time, it's proving very difficult to find any prayers with an intensity similar to Psalm 22, though John of the Cross clearly felt the same emptiness in this prayer.

Lord,
you seem absent,
and I do not know where to find you.
I search, but you are hidden.
I call, but there is no answer I can hear.
Everything in me feels empty,
as though you have withdrawn your light.

Moving quickly now to the weeks after Jesus was raised to life, the apostles felt deep grief and bewilderment about what had happened and what to do next. They'd been promised better things ahead, but had to wait in a room in Jerusalem for 50 days, doing very little. If in similar circumstances, this anonymous prayer is one we might make.

Lord,
We do not know the way ahead.
We do not know what is coming,
or what we should do,
or even what we are ready for.
We had hoped for clarity,
for a path that made sense,
for some sign we could follow,
but instead we find ourselves here,
uncertain and a little afraid.
So we admit it plainly, we have no clue.
No clear plan,
no quick vision,
no certainty about what lies ahead.
And yet you are God, you are still with us.
Teach us to trust you in the not-knowing.
To take the next small step,
even when we cannot see the road.
To listen more than speak,
and to wait with hope.

Hold us steady in this quiet place.
Keep us from rushing ahead out of fear,
or turning back out of doubt.
And if nothing else, Lord,
give us enough light for today,
and enough grace for whatever comes.
Amen.

To conclude, for some strange reason the events and incidents recorded in the bible are full of mystery and drama. We are not in the same situations, but our circumstances are also challenging and hard to understand. We ask, where is God? Here's a verse that might help, from Exodus 14.14,

The Lord will fight for you; you only need to be still.

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GARDENING TIPS FOR APRIL

April is a busy month in the garden. As the weather and soil begin to warm there are plenty of gardening jobs to do, from sowing and planting to essential maintenance such as pruning.

It is an exciting month as the indoor-sown seeds will be well into growth and it is also time to begin sowing annuals, herbs and wild flower seeds outdoors. Sowing seeds outside is an easy, inexpensive and fun way to grow new plants.

General cleaning of paths, patios, decking etc, as well as frames and greenhouses, is a good way to start the season. One job we tend to forget is the cleaning and checking of garden tools such as lawn mowers and hedge trimmers before the season really starts.

I find the most time consuming but rewarding job for this time of year is weed control for driveways, patios and borders. But remember, weeding must be continued throughout the year.

Remove any large leaves and branches that may have fallen during the recent windy weather. Cut back any old dead growth of herbaceous perennials and grasses. If you are able to, compost all except the weeds. You can now add compost (preferably peat free) or an organic fertiliser to the base soil if required.

In the greenhouse (after it is cleaned of course) you can start to pot up your Dahlia tubers and begin sowing seeds of Sunflowers, Sweet Peas, Cosmos and many types of vegetables such as Tomatoes, Lettuce, Carrots, Peas and Broad Beans.

If growing from seed is not your preferred garden task (too time-consuming and not a guaranteed success) then go for plug plants either online or from a garden centre.

Ensure that you don't plant out bedding plants until the risk of frost has past, you would usually not plant out until the end of May. You can plant out earlier but be prepared to protect them from frost with a cloche or some fleece.

Dead-head current bedding such as Primroses to encourage prolonged flowering. Also, dead-head faded Daffodils and Tulips but leave the green foliage in place as this will feed the bulbs for next year. Remove dead leaves from around the bases of alpine plants to prevent rot. Feed Roses with high potash fertiliser to encourage healthier and stronger flowers.

If you didn't do it in March, it is very valuable to prepare your beds and borders by improving the soil. Dig in around five centimetres thick layer of good multipurpose compost (peat free if you prefer) or well-rotted manure, as well as a small amount of all-purpose fertiliser (you now have some good organic choices).

Spring is the key breeding season for birds and so this means that green hedges should not be cut or trimmed if possible. The RSPB state that bird nesting season is between March and September. Migratory birds are arriving back and so they require high protein feed such as Sunflower and Niger seeds after their long flight back to your garden. If you can, why not put up a bird nesting box (asap). Also ensure there is a continuous supply of clean water for our feathered friends.

Be aware that Hedgehogs are now coming out of their hibernation, so if you feed them, you probably need to start now. We have seen 3 on our cameras over the past few days. Finally, watch out for slugs and snails especially on warmer days as they view young shoots of Delphiniums, Hostas and Lettuce as the equivalent to Caviar.

Have an enjoyable Easter!

Alan and Alison Cross

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KINGS AWARD

Laura Tucker, who is a member of the St Helen's PCC and church community, also spends her spare time serving as a trustee for the local charity 'Me&Dee'. The charity operates from a small office in Melbourne (Derbyshire) and provides comfort, care, and precious memories for families facing life-changing and life-limiting conditions. The charity supports families where a potentially life-limiting and often rare illness is diagnosed, by providing everything from private group swimming sessions, unique tailor made outings for families, support for siblings through craft sessions, and a specialist bereavement support group.

Happily, the charity have recently become recipients of the King's Award for Voluntary Service (KAVS). Equivalent to an MBE, KAVS is the highest award given to local voluntary groups in the UK.

Due to her role as trustee, Laura would love to keep on raising the profile of Me&Dee within the local community, as they do not receive any government funding, only the generous support of members of the public. They currently support around 100 families each year and have helped

You can read more about the charity here: <https://meanddee.co.uk/>





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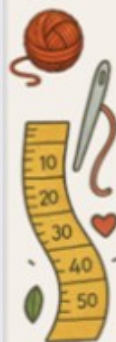
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If you'd like to contact Mo (the coordinator):
07748 157649

Or contact Anne (group leader)
she's on Instagram: @new_vintage_sewing



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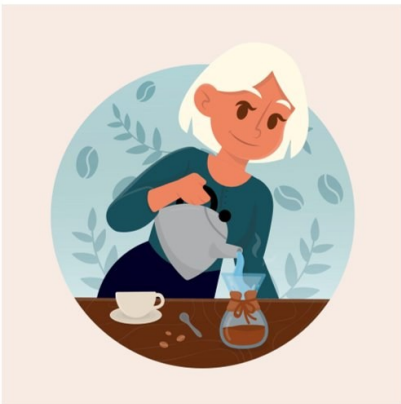
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Also featuring a music recital by Anna Haines and Andrew

Chapman– Monday 4th May, 12.30pm

Admission free, donations to the church welcomed.

