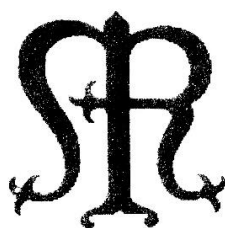

Newsletter #29

Friday 17th March to Friday 31st March 2023



St Mary's Church Eccleston /

St Mary's Church Pulford

[Eccleston and Pulford Churches](#)

Email:

EcclestonChurchWarden@ecclestonandpulfordchurches.org

PulfordChurchWarden@ecclestonandpulfordchurches.org

Dear Reader,

The parish newsletter as well as home worship guides for those unable to attend the service in person, are available to download from the church website:

<https://www.ecclestonandpulfordchurches.org/category/newsletters/>

For up-to-date service information please see the church website:

<https://www.ecclestonandpulfordchurches.org/services/>

Please feel free to email suggestions for future newsletter articles. Thank you to Jeanette Howe, Rob Hughes, Mike Nethercott, and Reverend Dr Stephen Torr for their contributions this week.

Kind Regards

Stephen Hutchinson (hutch@ecclestonandpulfordchurches.org)

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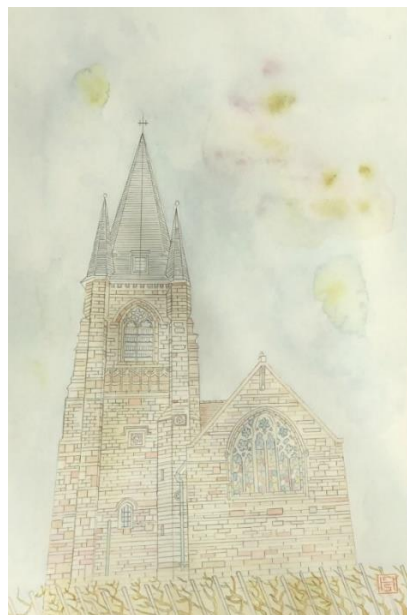


Figure 1 Pulford Church

Parish information

Rector:

Pulford/Eccleston	Revd. Dr Stephen Torr
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Church Wardens:

Pulford	Sue Payne	PulfordChurchWarden@ecclestonandpulfordchurches.org
Eccleston	John Richards	EcclestonChurchWarden@ecclestonandpulfordchurches.org

Lay Minister

Pulford/Eccleston	Jeanette Howe
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Planned Giving Officer / Treasurer

Pulford/Eccleston	Les Hocking
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Electoral Roll Officer

Eccleston	Andrew Wilkinson
Pulford	Clare Willan

Organists and Assistants

Pulford/Eccleston	Derek Whatling /Dennis Jones
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Director of Music

Eccleston/Pulford	Maureen Richards	mothemusic@gmail.com
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Tower Captains

Eccleston	Andrew Pridding
Pulford	

PCC Secretary

Pulford/Eccleston	Andrew Wilkinson
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Newsletter/Website

Pulford/Eccleston	Stephen Hutchinson	Hutch @ecclestonandpulfordchurches.org
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Introduction by the Reverend Dr Stephen Torr



Hi, I'm Steve Torr and I'm delighted to be the new Rector of the parish of Eccleston and Pulford! Having moved into the parish just after Christmas I have now begun my role and am enjoying settling into parish ministry in such a beautiful place.

Although my family and I have lived in the northwest for a few years now, I am originally from the Midlands town of Burton-on-Trent – famous for brewing beer and making Marmite! – where I was born and brought up before going on to study at the University of Birmingham, where I met my wife. For most of my childhood and teenage years I wanted to fly fast jets in the RAF but a change in direction in my late teens pointed me towards a degree and a doctorate in theology. During my studies I discerned a calling to ordained ministry in the Church of England and was accepted to train at Ridley Hall in Cambridge. I was ordained in 2012 and returned to the Midlands for my curacy where I was first based at a church in Wilnecote, Tamworth before completing my curacy in a group of churches on the outskirts of Stafford in rural Staffordshire.

After my curacy we moved to Runcorn where I was Priest-in-Charge of a suburban parish for just over five years whilst also, for some of that time, working for a Church of England training college called St Mellitus, teaching theology, and managing one of the training centres. My wife was ordained in 2021 and so we moved to the Wirral for her to take up her curacy whilst I was teaching at another Church of England training college called Emmanuel. I am currently drawing that post to a close as I step back into parish ministry here and look forward to discerning what God calls me to in this place at this time.

When I'm not working, I enjoy walking and running as well as reading and listening to music. I am married to Holly, and we have two children and a black Labrador. We are looking forward to being part of the communities here and getting to know everyone better.

Steve.

Church Service Dates Times and Locations.

All services will be led by the Reverend Dr Stephen Torr.

Date	St Mary's Church PULFORD	St Mary's Church ECCLESTON
Sunday 19 th Mar	9.45am Mothering Sunday communion Service.	11.15am All Age Mothering Sunday Service with Eccleston School
Sunday 26 th Mar		11.15am [Choral Communion]

Important News and Reminders: Food Bank

A reminder from Rachel Williams. Here are a few of the facts being highlighted on the Foodbank website: 3507, Emergency Food Parcels issued in 6 months to 30 September 22 - up 60% on pre pandemic levels, 7617, Local people in crisis fed, 2828, Feeding the equivalent of 2828 local children. The charity is very grateful for all donations - but especially non cook items such as crackers, Ryvita, Fish/meat pastes, Instant pastas/rice/soups and toiletries (toothpaste and brushes). They have PLENTY of dried Pasta, Baked Beans

Urgently Wanted

- Tinned Meat and Fish, Tomatoes, Desserts & Potatoes, UHT Milk & Juice, Custard, Small Jars Instant Coffee, Jams and Spreads, Instant Mashed, Cereal Bars, Instant Pasta & Instant Noodles

Also Wanted

- Cuppa Soup, Pot Noodles, Pasta Sauce, Biscuits, Breakfast Cereal

Free Lent Devotional

Jeanette has recommended a very useful free devotional that can be downloaded from the following Tear Fund website: <https://www.tearfund.org/campaigns/lent-devotional>

Rob Hughes Homily: Are we religious, or spiritual - or both? Rob's personal view.



Are you a fan of Douglas Adams' book "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" (and its sequels)? They're a 'Marmite thing' - you'll either love 'em or hate 'em. Guess what - I'm an addict... and I especially enjoy the story about "Deep Thought" - a mighty super-computer that was set the task of finding the answer to the question *what's life, the universe and everything all about?* After

75 million years of calculation, observation, evolution and experimentation, it came up with the answer "42".

All the religious leaders, spiritual gurus, theologians and philosophers cried out in utter disappointment and dismay: 'That's the wrong answer!' - to which Deep Thought quietly pointed out that they'd asked the wrong question.



It occurs to me that belief in a higher order of things ('supernatural', in the sense of beyond direct observation) has been around since the dawn of civilization, and probably triggered spiritualism. But ultimately this gave birth to the worship of (for example): nature itself; the Moon, Sun and stars; graven images; multiple gods; or one God. Most, if not all cultures, have believed about, and pursued ways of securing a place in, what lies beyond this life...

More recently, the Old Testament recounts the earliest times of the Jewish people, and how they came to worship One True God. The New Testament builds upon this, and introduces us to the once-for-all Saviour.

The Qur'an (Islam) takes a different route, but still reveres a single God.

Whilst all this was going on, there have been guides (such as shamans, Buddhas and occult seers) who have mentored people in an experience of spiritual awakening.

But about 500 years BC, there were many who pursued a purely spiritual path. Some, such as Gautama Buddha himself, weren't satisfied with the answers religion had to offer, so sought 'the divine', through personal reflection, and direct personal experience of spiritual awakening (often referred to as enlightenment). Which, for me at least, has raised an important question. Are religion and spirituality mutually-exclusive, or are there synergies?

When I was trying to select a couple of books for my own reading, I unexpectedly came across this title - 'Without Buddha I Could not be Christian'? It was written by Paul F. Knitter, a theologian who had experienced a crisis of faith. He looked to Buddhism for inspiration, and the book reflects that Buddhist teaching can facilitate a more person-centred approach to understanding Christian faith - in the context of fully reflecting on individual religious experience rather than simply pursuing liturgy and tradition. That's not to say liturgy and tradition are unimportant - they are; but, as the book explains, not if it's at the expense of spirituality.

If you've been following my fortnightly 'blogs', you'll know that whilst my Christian faith hasn't been seriously challenged, the way that I have been putting faith-into-practice has been fundamentally challenged - especially so since my retirement from volunteer ministry.

As a result of my investigations into 'Zen Wisdom for Christians' (the title of another Christian publication), I've been led into the examination of my own faith from a more spiritual point of view. This has led to a different (markedly more spiritual) understanding of Biblical texts, and I'm slowly but surely coming to understand that Christian faith naturally (inevitably) includes 'a spiritual dimension' to how we live, as well as how we think. After all, we believe in, and draw strength and inspiration from, The Holy Spirit. And Christ's message to the Samaritan woman and his disciples (in John 4) **clearly states** that "True worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth... God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth".

Pursuing a 'more spiritual' understanding of a Christian Journey is proving to be fascinating, scary and unnerving - as I struggle, at times, with the question as to the difference between religion, and spirituality. And I think the most important lesson I had to learn for myself (the hard way) has been that as soon as I try to rationalise 'the spiritual', it ceases to be spiritual !!

Too much thinking forces us to get in our own way, and we can easily lose the plot. One example of this is meditation, or stillness. If this is 'something we have to do' at a scheduled time in a busy life, rather than simply relaxing into quietness whenever we can (whenever the spirit moves us), we're in danger of missing most of the benefits. Just a few moments can be enough if we are alert to this.

But is the same not true of religion (belief and faith)? Isn't it true to say that many people may be put off by the fact that much of what we believe-in and have faith-in is 'unseen', and has to be 'felt deep within' rather than seen, touched and understood? Is the simple **recognition** of things unseen and eternal not, in itself, spirituality?

I found a lot of lists about similarities and differences between spirituality and religion, but I'd like to mention just one here. To paraphrase this: Religion tends to be more objective (taught; objective; follows defined paths that require communal worship). Whereas spirituality involves more subjective contemplation of personal perceptions and personal experience. So spirituality dawns and grows by itself, 'deep within'.

I've presented just one perspective here (of many that are possible). Over-simplistic? Maybe. But may I now propose that the similarities between religion and spirituality are much more compelling in many ways, especially in that both:

- Share a belief in a higher power, and a desire to be in touch with the divine
- Require regular practices (though these can be very different in form)
- Acknowledge that there's more to life than we can perceive through our senses, or learn-about from history and science.
- and that 'the answer' is definitely NOT 42!!

My own spiritual journey has been, and remains, difficult at times, because it requires a continuous re-examination of a lifetime of beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that have not always been 'right'. That self-realization requires 'change' - and that is most unnerving

1. Is all this tempting me towards Buddhism?

No, but I do have much greater respect for Buddhist teaching (and there are many Christian publications that talk about the wisdom of Buddhism for Christians).

2. Have I experienced a crisis of faith (as the author had)?

No, but I now have a profound awareness that it's absolutely fine with me that we don't have understand 'the spiritual', and that we're called to 'worship in spirit and truth' - to simply trust, and obey

3. Am I able to remain 'present' all the time?

Far from it, but I'm much more aware of the need to - so I can now 'allow' over-thinking, recognise it as 'unreal', and let it float on by as it crops up, rather than 'having to meditate.'

In conclusion, may I offer a purely personal view. Our Saviour instructed the early disciples that "True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth". My sense is that He was actively encouraging private reflection and private prayer, as well as communal worship. Is that not spirituality? So as disciples ourselves, we are expected to not only 'know' The Truth, and worship in Truth, we are also expected to embrace the spiritual, and to experience and practice spiritual lives. Perceiving the world through a spiritual 'lens', as well as through the senses. For me, the 'purely spiritual' is not enough; I still have faith in having a Christian faith. But more introspective ('spiritual') practices have enabled a host of different perspectives that have guided my Christian practices, and strengthened my Christian belief and faith. By no means an easy transition to make, but a most fulfilling one... May we pray:

Thank You, Father, for The Scriptures - written to help us to understand Your Word of truth. Thank You for the indwelling Holy Spirit, as our guide ion our Christian journey. We pray that we may learn to walk in spirit and truth so that we may mature in the Christian faith. Amen.

[Rob Hughes]

Tear Fund Rubbish Campaign

Jeanette also recommends signing the following Tear Fund campaign petition

<https://www.tearfund.org/campaigns/rubbish-campaign>

People around the world are facing mountains of plastic pollution. This is making people sick, releasing toxic fumes, flooding communities and causing up to a million deaths each year.

We're standing with Christians from more than ten countries and six continents, and calling for bold action to end the plastics crisis. We need an effective, binding plan that holds big polluters to account, reduces plastic production, supports the vital work of waste pickers, and ends the impacts of plastic pollution on people living in poverty. The more people we can get involved, the stronger our voice will be!

[Jeanette Howe]

Painting of Pulford Church by Mike Nethercott.

Mike has kindly agreed to allow me to share his lovely painting of Pulford Church in this newsletter.



A painting created during a retreat at Foxhill, by Jeanette Howe.



The painting is in a frame which contains three layers behind glass. The frames were made by the priest who led the retreat and is a friend. The bespoke frame has three slots to create space for pictures to be on show in rotation, however I thought it would be great to make something 3D with varying levels of transparency. The retreat was called "Created to Create; a creative arts retreat exploring how we are made in the image of God to be creative"

[Jeanette Howe]

Pulford Church Stained-Glass Windows of unknown origin.



It is certainly worth studying these beautiful stained-glass windows at Pulford Church.

On the East Wall of the North Transept at Pulford Church are 3 windows depicting 'childhood'.

There are of unknown origin and reportedly pre-date the church:

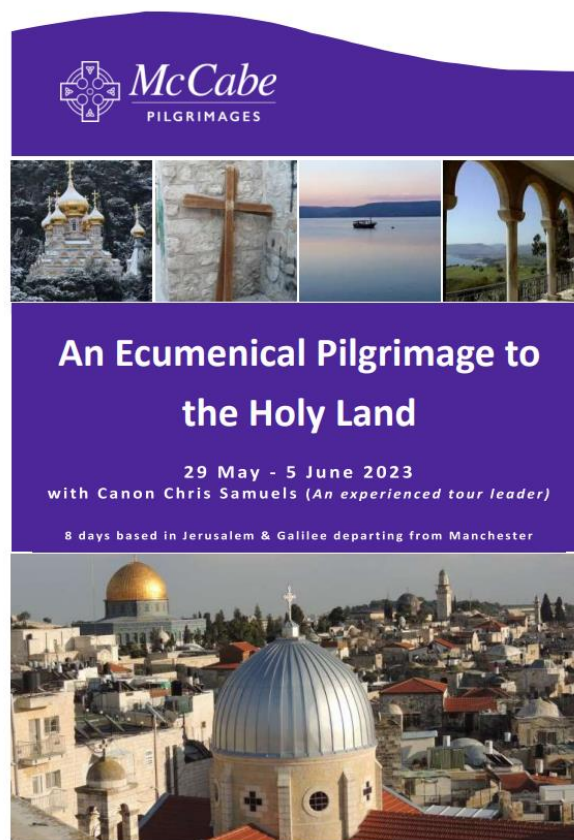
In the first panel we see John the Baptist as a child with his mother, Elizabeth, and his father Zacharias (Luke 1:5).

In the second panel we see Mary as a young girl, possibly visiting Elizabeth (Luke 1:39).

In the third panel we see Christ as a young boy, with halo (Luke 2:40)

Pilgrimage to the Holy Land – 29th May – 5th June 2023

A reminder that Canon Chris Samuels will be leading a trip to the Holy Land next year.



For details of the pilgrimage and contact details for Chris please click on the following link to see the brochure.

<https://mccabelive.eecsoftware.com/clientlibrary/mccabe/Images/0529%20Samuels%20MAN%20BROCHURE%20insurance%20for%20WEB.pdf>

To book a place visit ...[8 Day Holy Land Pilgrimage - McCabe Pilgrimages \(mccabe-travel.co.uk\)](https://mccabe-travel.co.uk)

and click on the "show all dates and availability" button. Chris's pilgrimage is the one listed for 29/05/2023.

Here is a link showing the fascinating beauty of the Holy Lands:

[Video of typical Holy Land tour](#)