

## **St Mary's ACM 2025 – Walton Churches Partnership (WCP) & Deanery Report**

This year has seen significant change in the clergy team who serve our Partnership. As most of you know, we are part of a team of four congregations, alongside All Saints, MK Village (also pastored day-to-day by Matt), Christ the King Kents Hill and Church Without Walls Broughton and Brooklands.

In May 2024 we said a fond farewell to Rev. Ruth Gookey, Baptist Minister for our Partnership, who was based at Christ the King. We were very sad that Ruth's health challenges did not allow her to continue, although we have been pleased to hear that her new life in Yeovil is going well so far. It did, though, mean that CtK entered another vacancy period, less than five years after the previous one ended. It has been a challenging season for the congregation – nevertheless, we were delighted that Rev. Ian Pearce joined us as Interim Minister in August 2024. He is doing a great job so far. We continue to advertise for a new permanent appointment – financial constraints limiting this to a 60% post (rather than full-time).

In May, Rev. Ruth Maxey also formally began her new role as part-time Minister for Church Without Walls and part-time Minister for Newport Pagnell URC. She was licensed in Newport at a very joyful service in September, and, so far, managing the demands of two congregations has been going well.

We have also been delighted to welcome Rev. Alison Drury as our Curate: she was ordained deacon at the end of June 2024 and has been serving (as time allows) across all four congregations – albeit primarily at All Saints and St. Mary's. We look forward to her ordination as priest on 28<sup>th</sup> June this year.

Our life as a Partnership continues to flourish. LEPs in Milton Keynes have generally been under much pressure and scrutiny in recent years – we are blessed in Walton to have unity in our leadership structures, a harmonious community life, sustainable finances and many ministries which are thriving. We give thanks and glory to God, even as we recognise that this happy state takes immense work to maintain. May the Lord continue to grant us grace to work well together, and continued blessing as we do so.

There have likewise been significant personnel changes across wider life in MK. Rev. Paul Oxley has been appointed as part-time Area Dean (he is also the Pastor of St Mark's MK), ably supported by Revs Gill Barrow-Jones and Catherine Butt. They are a great team, and our Deanery life has grown greatly in unity and energy in recent months.

The year has also seen the finalisation and adoption of our ten-year Deanery Plan, including a new Mission Fund. A large bid for diocesan investment in MK is currently in progress and is due for submission in January 2026. We don't know yet what this might mean for Walton, although I have had a number of conversations about possibilities. We are blessed, though, to have both of our Walton deanery reps – Jonathan Bailey and Carolyn Sanderson – serving on the Deanery Mission and Pastoral Committee and therefore playing an important role in all the good things that are happening around the deanery at present, as well as discussions regarding the future. I would like to express my sincere thanks to them both.

The last month has also witnessed the consecration and installation of the new Bishop of Buckingham, Rt. Rev. Dave Bull (Bishop Dave). Our new bishop will be playing a much bigger role in the spiritual life of MK, and from 2027 will also be living in our city. There is a new sense of hope and optimism, perhaps more than for some years – we look forward to all that this might mean!

*Matt, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2025*