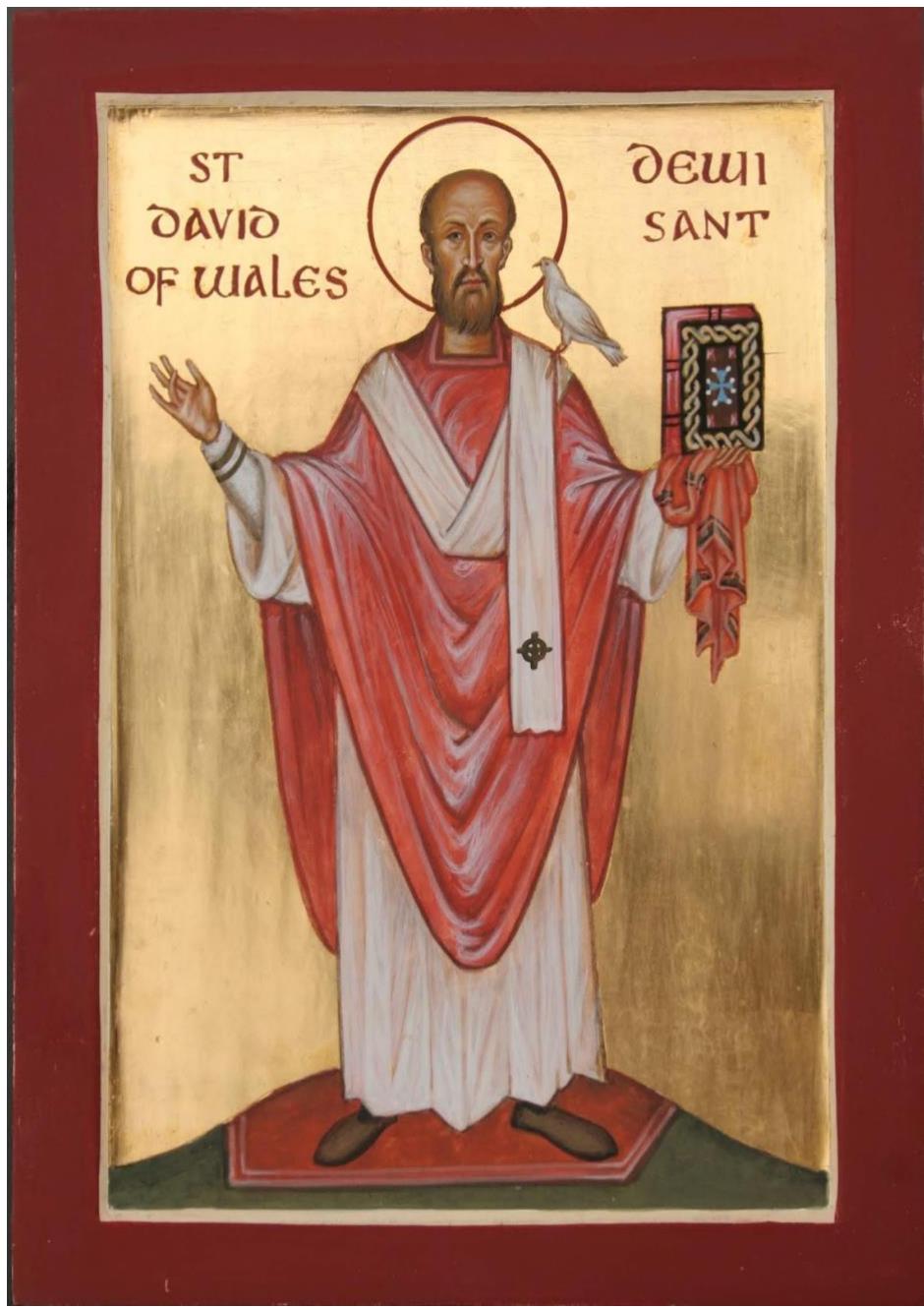


NEWSLINK

FEBRUARY - MARCH 2026

CANTON UNITING CHURCH



David was a native of Wales, and tradition has preserved a large amount of detail about his life. His birth date, however, is uncertain: suggestions range from 462 to 512. He is traditionally believed to be the son of Non and the grandson of Ceredig ap Cunedda, King of Ceredigion. The Welsh annals placed his death 569 years after the birth of Christ.

His last words to his followers were in a sermon on the previous Sunday. The Welsh Life of St David gives these as, "Lords, brothers and sisters, Be joyful, and keep your faith and your creed, and do the little things that you have seen me do and heard about. And as for me, I will walk the path that our fathers have trod before us."

"Do the little things in life" ("Gwnewch y pethau bychain") is today a very well known phrase in Welsh.

Pastorate Ministers

Revd. David Dean

Revd Martha McInnes

Canton Uniting Church Deacons in May, 2025

Alison Walker (Chair) Chair@cantonuniting.org.uk

Audrey Takle Bookings@cantonuniting.org.uk

Barbara Morgans (Minutes Secretary)

Eva Elliott Garden@cantonuniting.org.uk

Fiona Harding (Secretary) Secretary@cantonuniting.org.uk

Megan Atherton

Alan Farnham

David Smith

Ceri George

Marieke Arthur

Ex officio

Andrew Wilson-Dickson Music@cantonuniting.org.uk

Kenneth Woods (Treasurer) Treasurer@cantonuniting.org.uk

Dear Friends,

February, 2026

As we write, the events of the world continue to alarm us. From Iran to Venezuela and Cuba, to Greenland and the USA, we can only wonder what is happening in the craziness of each day. Many of us prefer not to know. Some of us cannot keep from watching. Every day we have conversations about what is happening, how to address it, and what might cause such pain to make itself known in the world in these particular ways.

What, if anything, can be our responses? We don't have power. We don't live in those countries--though we may have friends or family who do. They may seem like remote events, but we have to wonder when similar events might make their ways to our shores or how these events will impact this side of the world? And then there are things that happen here--from a shooting at a synagogue to rallies in London. Events, alarming events do take place in communities near us.

We can ignore these events, but it seems to us that rather than ignore them, we have to face into this reality and find appropriate responses. What are our options? Author and historian, Diana Butler Bass, uses the women placed by each gospel writer along Jesus' route to the cross and at the base of the cross while Jesus is dying, to give us some direction in the face of our global crises.

Bass suggests that we sometimes forget the pain these women witnessed. Jesus was going to his death. He was tortured and troubled, yet these women found a way to walk alongside him to witness to his pain and his death. Bass suggests that these women give us a glimpse into what our response might be. She suggests we are called to be witnesses to the events of the world. Rather than ignore and hide from what is happening we commit to seeing the people in trouble, pain in the world, the reality of climate crisis, etc. Part of our role as witnesses is to make the presence of God known in the world. Another part of our role is to turn toward the pain of the world in order to note it.

In Gainesville, Florida, we regularly attended a church with a wall of glass windows. In this case the windows looked out upon a wooded area. It was a beautiful backdrop for worship. What would happen if, instead of stained glass or cloudy glass, all our windows were clear? The stained glass, while beautiful, sometimes feels like it hides our connection to the world. If all our windows were clear, we could see the world during worship. Of course, our settings are not always beautiful, but they are God's good creation--whether it is a busy street, a pub, or a carpark. With clear windows, the connection between worship and the communities in which we live might be more obvious. Can we clear the windows of our hearts and bring the world into our worship space, our prayer lives, and our actions of Jesus?

'The victim asks the bystander to share the burden of pain. The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering', writes Judith Herman. We have to witness what is happening and tell the story. Sometimes we have to remember the person, like Renee Good. Sometimes we have to say what we see happening. And sometimes we have to tell an alternative story--one of justice, mercy and grace--all of which are God's story. These are challenging times. May God guide us to the work and witness which reflects love.

Peace,

Martha and David

Lent Groups

Lent begins on 18 February with Ash Wednesday. In Lent we will offer a series of reflective learning groups. They will be based on the book, 'Receiving Jesus: The Way of Love,' by Marrian Edgar Budde, the bishop of Washington, DC. Budde looks at what she feels are essential practices which enable us to live in love.

Sessions will happen at Canton Uniting Church, Wednesdays from 6 p.m. and 7 p.m. and at Beulah and City, Thursdays, from 7.30 p.m. to 9 p.m. The sessions at Canton begin on 4 February but do not include 18 February. The sessions at Beulah and City begin on 26 February, and alternate between the two venues, starting at Beulah. You are welcome to attend whichever suits your schedule each week. Martha and David will be leading the session at City and Beulah.

Bible Study

Bible Study will take place again on 25 February, in the MWL; continuing our exploration of Matthew. Come along. Bring your evening meal if you like. We will start at 6.30 p.m.

12-14 June 2026, Trefeca

'In the Shadows' we will be looking at some of the characters we don't notice very often in the Bible.

We gather on Friday evening and leave Sunday after lunch. Saturday afternoon is free to walk, talk or explore the local area. All welcome. Talk to Martha if you are interested.

The accommodation and food are fabulous.

A Morning for Mindful Making

In response to the pain of our world, Martha will lead a session on how to make 'peace pebbles.' The process is focused on creating, which may quiet our busy minds, and give us moments to pray and chat while we are crafting.

On 28 February from 10.30 to Noon, come upstairs and join the session. The pebbles can be used later to focus your thoughts and prayers throughout the day to pray for peace for yourself and the world.



Let Martha know if you plan to attend.

Tech Savvy Christians

I have long struggled to figure out what technology means for the future of Christianity. My professional career ended when emails had become the popular way to communicate, leaving out a significant generation of the church, and we were still printing our newsletters instead of sending them out effortlessly by email attachment. Now a tangled web of algorithms is designed to adapt social media to the networks in the individual brain, meetings are conducted by Zoom. It is all getting less and less interpersonal. Politics seems to be conducted through posts on X. The stock market is dominated by increasingly sophisticated software making split second decisions to maximise profit. National economies these days are thriving on the spending power of the super-rich who dominate the tech business, especially AI investment, while the rest of the economy has become stagnant. And this pattern has led to an increasing gap in the division between rich and poor. The new tech world is not only making possible advances in drone warfare, for which Ukraine is a testing ground, but also advances in how the rich and powerful dominate the rest of us. From the start of agricultural economies to the Bronze Age forward it has always been so. AI is already making it worse.

We have become, most of us, creatures of a Selfie Culture in which the algorithms hone everything to the small space of our private desires, and shape those desires to want what the corporate world decides we will want. This structural relationship to the world we live in is nothing new. St Augustine described sin as "an incurvature of the spirit" inward to self-focused longings, instead of outward to neighbour. In our world we can see that this incurvature of the spirit is not just the product of the naturally self-oriented personality but even more so by our entanglement with the world we live in and particularly with big tech, which is such a money-spinner for the rich and powerful. They own our minds.

That means we are in a classic Christian situation. We are slaves in need of an Exodus. Maybe we need a Jesus who says to us , "Blessed are the poor, the meek, the hungry, the powerless. Insofar as they KNOW they are powerless, that they hunger and thirst for righteousness, they know the world is not working as it should, and needs to change. Maybe the pursuit of justice can start by the scandalous and revolutionary action of committing ourselves to meeting around a table instead of on Zoom. But that is probably too much to ask of us, who are so wedded to the Web.

Tom Arthur

What is Christian Nationalism, and is it something that we should be worried about?

Like every other label or term used in this contested area, the definition of Christian Nationalism is disputed. For example, some people use it simply to refer to Christians who are proud of their country—nothing wrong with that!

But in our day, the term is being increasingly used to refer to a conflation of Christian identity and national identity; a sort of merging of the religious and the political. To adapt Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry's definition for the British context:

Christian Nationalism is a cultural framework—a collection of myths, traditions, symbols, narratives, and value systems—that idealises and advocates a fusion of Christianity with [national] civic life... The 'Christianity' of Christian nationalism represents something more than religion... It is as ethnic and political as it is religious.

Does this sound familiar? Well, you might have been watching a similar phenomenon growing on the other side of the Atlantic—and, indeed, in a number of other countries. The January 6th insurrection was a highly political event broadly clothed in Christian imagery, symbolism, language and even public prayer. That's a version of Christian Nationalism in action.

So, what's going on within our own shores, and should we be worried? Because I'm interested in the use of Christian Scripture by political movements, I've been watching the trends on the right-hand-side of the political spectrum for a few years. Let me take you through a few key moments.

- 2014-2015. The group 'Britain First' runs a number of operations, which it refers to as 'crusades'. These include the 'invasion' of mosques in Bradford and Keighley with Bibles and leaflets; and the parading through Muslim-majority areas of major British cities with large white crosses, chanting 'Muslims Go Home', and 'It's our country, not your country. It's a Christian country'.
- Ramadan, 2024. Bristol Cathedral opens its doors for local Muslims and non-Muslims to share a 'Grand Iftar'. No act of worship is conducted. An ordained priest decries this on Twitter as being indicative that we are living in 'the The Islamic Caliphate of Great Britain'. Responses on the thread include explicit calls for Crusade.
- July 2024. Tommy Robinson holds a rally in London, headlining more than one Christian cleric. One gives a speech saying, 'We are not at war with just the Muslim', and 'Today when I look out across this square, I don't pray for revival in the land. Because today... in Trafalgar Square, I can see in thousands of faces that revival has already begun.'
- September 2025. The Unite the Kingdom rally in London draws around 150,000 people from around the country, attending with a wide variety of motives and intentions, many of them reasonable. However, on the platform are a number of prominent Christians, including one who said 'This is a religious war. It's Jesus Christ versus Satan... We got to get everything out that does not know or receive Jesus Christ. Ban any type of public expression in our Christian nations from other religions.'

What we see here is a rapid growth of this movement from a small, niche group to a popular (and populist) movement. We also see the progression from what might be called a 'Far Right' phenomenon (following Cas Mudde's definition of 'Far Right' as a movement

which offers a threat to liberal democracy) to explicit Christian Nationalism by the summer of 2024.

So, should we be worried? I would say yes to concern—but no to panic.

Yes, we should be concerned that the Christian message, of God's scandalous grace being poured out through the weakness and folly of the Cross, is being co-opted to promote something which is at times exclusionary, hateful and even violent. We should also be concerned because many Muslims, immigrants, and people of colour in our country are feeling scared and intimidated right now. The threat to democracy is a concern, too. There are people in our political spaces at present who would seek to undermine important democratic freedoms (such as freedom of religious expression and the independence of the press). And we should be concerned about the long-standing faultlines which these movements are both exposing and exploiting: the structural deprivation in many rural and inner-city communities, the deep sense of disenfranchisement experienced by many in the working class and underclass. Bluntly, many working-class people have felt patronised by both church and government for far too long.

But there is no need for panic. Because we have a better story. The Christian story told by many of these movements is 'thin'—it relies on slogans, and visual symbols detached from their deeper meaning. But we have a rich, 'thick' and deep story; the ancient gospel which saved the apostle Paul, Aquinas, Augustine, Luther, Wesley—and us. We don't need to reinvent it, we don't need to politicise it, and we don't need to be fearful that Christianity is under threat. The Spirit is as living and active today as ever.

And we should be encouraged by the fact that local churches up and down the land are already getting on with the quiet but vital work of loving our neighbours, preaching the gospel, working to reconcile those in conflict, feeding the hungry, and supporting the vulnerable. This is small, but it matters. The Kingdom of God grows like yeast.

But this moment presents a challenge, too. We don't need to buy into the false dichotomy that we Christians must either seize power or else be consigned forever to privatise our faith. There is an important third way—the way of the prophetic church. The prophetic church has no need to be 'in the room where it happens', although individual believers must and will follow the call of God to be salt and light in the public arena, including local and national government. But the church does not need privilege to fulfil its calling to speak boldly and clearly for the cause of the vulnerable, hold the powerful to high standards of truthfulness, and promote the cause of justice for all.

In 1930 an American pastor called Harry Fosdick wrote a hymn entitled 'God of Grace and God of Glory'. We could do worse than pick up his refrain in our own day:

*Grant us wisdom, grant us courage
For the facing of this hour.*

Helen Paynter is a Baptist minister who now serves as tutor in biblical studies at the Bristol Baptist College. She is the founding director of the Centre for the Study of Bible and Violence, and the author of a number of books and articles. Her co-edited book *The Church, the Far Right, and the Claim to Christianity* (SCM, 2023) explored how the British church might respond to the use of Scripture by right-wing groups, and her forthcoming toolkit *Faithful Presence in a Fractured World: A church toolkit for far-right resistance* (Canterbury Press, 2026) aims to offer some practical help for churches.

Lent 2026

Canton Uniting Church
Cowbridge Road East

Wednesdays 6pm to 7pm
4th, 11th, 25th February
4th, 11th, 18th, 25th March



Reflections

on a book

by Mariann Edgar Budde

*Bishop of the Diocese of
Washington*

*Receiving Jesus
THE WAY OF LOVE*

everyone is welcome

Concert at CUC on the 25th of January

The concert featured Ernest Liu on piano, with 4 baritones singing Schubert's Winterreise.



Thanks to Ken for the photos.

Concerts at CUC, Spring 2026

February

1st Sunday 6pm Tom Ollerndorff Jazz Guitar

15th Sunday 3pm Andrew Wilson-Dickson & Nicki Rose duet

22nd Sunday 3pm Geoff Eales and friends



The economics of megachurches

Why America's fastest-growing churches don't get political

Each week 45,000 people come to pray in a converted basketball stadium in Houston. On Christmas Eve the unconventional Lakewood Church sanctuary filled with a crowd that looked like a cross-section of America in matching red outfits. When the pastor began telling the story of a baby born in Bethlehem on a starry evening like this one, the massive screens behind him twinkled and smoke machines coated the stage in a cozy fog. A man sang a gospel rendition of "Silent Night" in Spanish and when the beat dropped every person in the bleachers (cheap bench seats) felt the thump of the bass in their body.

Researchers have found that services like this one, at America's biggest church, can leave people feeling like they are high on drugs. It is perhaps no surprise then that while most American churches are struggling to fill pews, megachurches—the 1,800 or so with Hollywood-style production and mesmerising crowds—are only getting bigger. In the past five years Americans have flocked to the sprawling suburbs of the sunbelt where these churches thrive. When small churches shut during the pandemic, the big ones were ready to absorb their congregants. Today, although most churches have fewer than 100 members, 70% of people attend the largest 10%. The product that they sell is changing Christianity in America.

The megachurch business model is all about growth. At any given service roughly a sixth of the crowd is made up of newcomers, says Scott Thumma of the Hartford Institute for Religious Research. At North Point Community Church outside Atlanta, where fake snow fell during the opening act on a recent Sunday, a battalion of volunteers at the "connections" booth give first-timers gifts and usher them towards "small groups" they can join. To meet prospective congregants closer to home, churches are now franchising. Some rent high-school gyms and theatres that are empty on weekend mornings, others are buying new buildings. Oklahoma's Life Church has 46 campuses and Alabama's Church of the Highlands has 27. The expansion has turned church into much more than a Sunday service: it's where members play pickup sports, attend marriage counseling, take anger-management lessons and send their children to school. Many megachurches now run colleges.

That reach shows up in the money they are bringing in. Surveys run by the Hartford Institute found that between 2020 and 2025, the average megachurch's annual revenue rose by 25%, from \$5.3m to \$6.6m. Nearly all of it came from congregant donations. Megachurches report spending half of their cash on staff salaries, just over a third on building maintenance and programming and a tenth on charity. But beyond what they choose to disclose, their finances are a mystery.

Federal tax law exempts churches from filing annual returns and shields them from audits. "The only people keeping an eye on these big churches are insiders," says Lloyd Hitoshi Mayer of the University of Notre Dame. In 2021 a pastor at another megachurch in Houston was convicted of defrauding investors out of nearly \$3.6m. A more recent lawsuit accused church leaders of misusing tithes. The glitz invites more suspicion. Some pastors live in large houses, accept expensive gifts like cars from members and make millions

from book deals. About a quarter preach the prosperity gospel, a theology that asserts that God rewards faith with material wealth. “I can’t be a big blessing to people if I’m poor and broke and depressed,” Joel Osteen, the best-known among them and Lakewood’s senior pastor, said on the Oprah show.

For decades megachurches have been trend-setters in the evangelical world. Their worship music and TED Talk-style sermons go viral and they have made jeans and Nike shoes acceptable churchwear. But courting today’s jaded masses incentivises them to avoid anything too substantive, for fear of alienating people. Most megachurches, like a rising share of American protestants, are now non-denominational. Rather than tie themselves to traditional sects with rigid doctrines they are building brands that are designed to be popular and flexible. The result is a Christianity that looks more like a crash course in self-help than an age-old faith anchored in scripture. The central message on Christmas at Lakewood was “don’t stop believing”. Congregants were told that God’s grace is coming and they should keep fighting the devil of depression, or give rehab one more try.

It is for the same reason that the majority of megachurch pastors do not preach politics. Rarely do they even address hot-button issues like abortion or homosexuality from the pulpit. This summer the Trump administration scrapped rules that stripped pastors of some tax exemptions if they publicly endorsed political candidates. Nonetheless most of the churches that responded to the Hartford survey said they had no plans to start doing it. “They’re not prophets screaming into the wilderness, these guys are running multi-million-dollar empires,” says Ryan Burge, who studies religion at Washington University in St Louis. “Why would they imperil that?”

Albert Mohler, the head of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, reckons that young people want a Christianity that is more serious and that megachurches will wane if being associated with them doesn’t give their members social capital. He calls the prosperity gospel a “direct threat to biblical Christianity” and a “pseudo-religion”. Inside Lakewood Church there is no cross on display. Instead, at the back of the stadium a giant American flag glows above the bleachers. Here the biggest draw is something easier to follow than any of Jesus’s teachings: the gospel of American capitalism.

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Pastoral News



This month we celebrated the life of Mrs Barbara Jones, wife of Idris, a joyful active devoted wife of Idris and member of Grand Avenue Church in Ely. She ran the playgroup there with Mrs Jean Hawkins and Pat Marshall for many years. Music and Church, choirs, and pantomimes were a big part of community life in Grand Avenue, and churches worked together on productions as well as having One Christmas Carol service with one



combined choir! Ask David and Joy about the pantomimes...David even grew his own beard to be one of the apostles!

We stand with Vivian and Jacqueline and the family, in sharing the life of our sister Barbara also sharing their loss. May God bless us all with this memory.



We also celebrated the life of Audrey's sister Desri Takle. She was a very active member of the Presbyterian church in Grangetown, She grew up and lived on Beda Road, the oldest of 5 children. Her 'little sister' Audrey and I enjoyed her very quick wit until the last days in Nazareth House.

May God bless her siblings Hilary, Howard and Audrey with her memory.

Canton Uniting Church Services Rota February - March 2026

If you cannot do duties, please find someone to replace you. Thank you.

Sunday 1st February 2026

Lectionary Readings: Micah 6.1-8; Psalm 15; 1 Corinthians 1.18-31; Matthew 5.1-12

Worship Leader: Revd Tom Arthur

Welcome Deacon/Steward: Sian and Josh

Deacon on notices: Alison

Readers: Jan and Hugh

Refreshments: Fiona and Rob

Sunday 8th February 2026

Lectionary Readings: Isaiah 58.1-9a, (9b-12); Psalm 112; 1 Corinthians 2.1-12 (13-16); Matthew 5.13-20

Worship Leader: Revd Martha McInnes or Revd David Dean

Welcome Deacon/Steward: Alan

Deacon on notices: Fiona

Readers: Sian and Alan

Refreshments: Hugh and Bence

Sunday 15th February 2026 (Communion)

Lectionary Readings: Exodus 24.12-18; Psalm 99; 2 Peter 1.16-21; Matthew 17.1-9

Worship Leader: Revd David Dean or Revd Martha McInnes

Welcome Deacon/Steward: Abi

Deacon on Notices: Megan

Readers: Alison and Eva

Communion Preparation: Audrey

At the communion table: Megan and David

Refreshments: Marieke

Sunday 22nd February 2026

Lectionary Readings: Genesis 2.15-17; 3.1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5.12-19; Matthew 4.1-11

Worship Leader: Revd. Dr Tom Arthur

Welcome Deacon/Steward: Ceri

Deacon on Notices: Eva

Readers: Taiwo and Ken

Refreshments: Ann

Sunday 1st March 2026

Lectionary Readings: Genesis 12.1-4a; Psalm 121; Romans 4.1-5,13-17; John 3.1-17

Worship Leader: Mike Munnik

Welcome Deacon/Steward: David

Deacon on notices: Ken

Readers: Becky and Fiona

Refreshments: Abi

Sunday 8th March 2026

Lectionary Readings: Exodus 17.1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5.1-11; John 4.5-42

Worship Leader: TBA

Welcome Deacon/Steward: Ann

Deacon on notices: Ceri

Readers: Ceri and Alison

Refreshments: Sian and Josh

Sunday 15th March 2026 (Communion) MOTHERING SUNDAY

Lectionary Readings: 1 Samuel 16.1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5.8-14; John 9.1-41

Worship Leader: Revd. David Dean or Revd Martha McInnes

Welcome Deacon/Steward: Jan

Deacon on notices: Alison

Readers: David and Marieke

Communion Preparation: Hugh and Bence

At the Communion table: Eva and Alison

Refreshments: Megan

Sunday 22nd March 2026 PASSION SUNDAY

Lectionary Readings: Ezekiel 37.1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8.6-11; John 11.1-45

Worship Leader: Revd. David Dean or Revd. Martha McInnes

Welcome Deacon/Steward: Audrey

Deacon on notices: Fiona

Readers: Jan and Hugh

Communion Preparation: Alison

At Communion table: Eva and Alison

Refreshments: Hiroko

Sunday 29th March 2026 PALM SUNDAY

Shared Pastorate Palm Sunday service in City URC at 10.30am

CUC closed but lifts will be organised

Thursday 2nd April MAUNDY THURSDAY COMMUNION 7:30

Worship Leader: Revd. Martha Mc Innes

Sunday 5th April 2026 EASTER SUNDAY

Lectionary Readings: Jeremiah 31.1-6; Psalm 118.1-2,14-24; Colossians 3.1-4; Matthew 28.1-10

Worship Leader: Revd Dr Tom Arthur

Welcome Deacon/Steward: Rob

Deacon on Notices: Megan

Readers: Abi and Megan

Refreshments: The Munniks

CANTON UNITING CHURCH was established in 1995 when New Trinity United Reformed Church joined with Llandaff Road Baptist Church and in 2013 joined with Grand Avenue United Reformed Church Ely which in 2005 had united with Saintwell URC. We are committed to ecumenism through our links with Cytûn, the Covenanted Churches and Churches Together in Canton. Our previous minister was the Chair of the Committee of the Covenanted Baptists which, with the Church in Wales, the Presbyterian, Methodist and United Reformed Churches seeks to bring about the goal of uniting together.

CONTACTS

Ministers: Revd. Martha McInnes - Tel.: 07519 831405
 Revd. David Dean - Tel.: 07772 714388

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Treasurer: Kenneth Woods Email: Treasurer@Cantonuniting.org.uk

Chair: Mrs Alison Walker Email: Chair@Cantonuniting.org.uk

Website: www.cantonuniting.org.uk

USUAL WEEKLY DIARY & MONTHLY EVENTS -

The Wednesday evening prayers on Zoom have finished.

CANCELLED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

AND FINALLY ... Please hand in material for the next Newslink to Hugh Morgans by the end of the Morning service on **Sunday, March 22nd, 2026**

Email address: hughmorgans@hotmail.com

