



outlook

Newsletter of **Pond Square Chapel** | Highgate United Reformed Church | **March 2026 - May 2026**



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• Minister's Reflection

Ecce Homo – “Behold the Man”

As we enter Lent, we are invited to slow down, to pray, and to look honestly at Christ's suffering and our own hearts. One powerful visual meditation for this season is *Ecce Homo* (1871) by Antonio Ciseri. The painting captures the moment in John's Gospel when Pontius Pilate presents the scourged Jesus to the crowd and declares, “Behold the man.”

Christ stands robed in white, crowned with thorns, a reed placed in his hand in cruel mockery. His body bears the marks of violence. Yet his posture is composed, dignified, almost serene. Pilate gestures outward toward the unseen crowd, and we realise that we stand where that crowd would have stood. The painting does not allow us to remain detached observers. We are addressed directly. “Behold the man.”

Lent is a season of beholding. It asks us not to look away.

In a world saturated with images of conflict and suffering, we can become numb. We see ongoing war in Ukraine, devastation in Gaza, humanitarian crises across parts of Africa, and rising hardship at home as families struggle with the cost of living. We scroll past headlines and images with heavy hearts, often unsure what to do. But Lent interrupts our scrolling. It asks us to stop and look at Christ.

When Pilate says, “Behold the man,” there is something almost pleading in his words. Look at him. See him. Is this truly the enemy you fear? In Ciseri's painting, the noise of the crowd is absent. There is a stillness that allows us to see clearly. Christ is exposed, vulnerable, yet not diminished. He is not reduced to spectacle. His humanity remains intact.

Before he is proclaimed King, before he is crucified, he is simply this: a man. In an age when people are often reduced to labels (migrant, opponent, statistic, “other”) Christ stands before us as a reminder of irreducible human dignity. Lent calls us to rediscover that dignity in one another. To behold Christ is to learn how to behold our neighbour.

The perspective of the painting is deliberate. We stand in the place of the crowd. The question becomes personal: how do we respond to vulnerability? Do we join the chorus of accusation, even subtly? Do we turn away because suffering is uncomfortable? Do we allow harsh public language to shape our own hearts? Lent presses gently but firmly on these questions.

This season is not simply about giving something up; it is about clarity of vision. Fasting, prayer, and generosity are disciplines that train our sight. They slow us down enough to notice Christ and to notice those who suffer around us.

In Ciseri's painting, Pilate represents power, political authority, control, and distance. Christ represents another kind of power — the power of self-giving love. In a time when leadership is debated fiercely across our nation and beyond, the contrast is striking. What kind of power do we admire? Power that dominates, or power that serves? Power that protects itself at all costs, or power willing to suffer for others?

The cross reveals that God's power is not coercive but cruciform.

To behold Christ in this moment is to confront both truth and hope. The truth is that injustice is real. Human cruelty wounds deeply. The marks on Christ's body tell that story plainly. Lent does not allow us to romanticise suffering.

But there is hope too. Christ's calm presence tells us that violence does not have the final word. Dignity cannot be stripped away by humiliation. Love endures, even under pressure.

And so this Lent, perhaps our discipline is simple: to practice holy attention. To look at Christ long enough for compassion to grow. To see him in the elderly neighbour who feels forgotten, in the anxious young person uncertain about the future, in the stranger seeking welcome. "Behold the man" becomes "Behold the person before you." As we journey toward Holy Week, may we resist the temptation to look away. May we allow Christ's suffering to soften rather than harden us. And in beholding him, may we be reshaped into people who recognise his image in every human face.



Ecce homo by Antonio Ciseri

• Rowena Courtney

We were saddened to learn of the death of Rowena Courtney in January.

Rowena was known as a beloved minister's wife, faithful elder and friend to many in the congregation. At her funeral service, her son delivered this eulogy and with the family's permission, we print it in this edition of the church magazine.

"Rowena was my mother and as it is my 68th birthday today I can say with some authority that she was a very good mother for a very long time.

She was born in the West Riding of Yorkshire to a family who at the time farmed the steep valley slopes of the Pennines. It was probably here that her love of animals developed. Life did not always treat her family well and there was not much money at home. She showed early academic promise, passing the 11+ for a place at Halifax Grammar School.

At age 15, when she might have been expected to leave school and get a job to support herself and her family, she won a scholarship to allow her to stay and finish her schooling.

At the end of those studies came a major achievement. Not only was she offered a place at Oxford University, she won a prestigious Open Scholarship bringing the finance to allow her to take it up. At Oxford she enjoyed her study of maths and also had other interests. She was a strong sportswoman who was picked to represent the university as a hockey blue. Although raised a Baptist, she went along to the Congregational Society where she met Robert.

As well as their strong Christian belief they shared a love of mountains, rock climbing in the Lakes and on the Black Cuillin on the Isle of Skye. I was envious later when a friend in the Canadian Parks had them dropped by helicopter in the remote Rockies, where they spent a week walking back to civilisation.

At the end of Robert's qualifications they married and went to his first church at Clayton in the Potteries. Robert talks with pride of how Rowena's efforts were vital; they worked as a team and although it exhausted them, the congregation grew dramatically.

It was here that I was born, along with my brother Andy.

Their next church was Dewsbury, an industrial town back in the West Riding.

Here Peter, her third son joined us and during this time her focus was on the family; we were always loved, looked after and well provided for. Her family focus did not mean that her spirit of adventure was subdued. There were holidays wild camping in the remote north of Scotland and (perhaps rather less legally) in quiet Cornish coves. There was a trip with three young boys crammed in the window-less back of a tiny mini van through Europe to a cold war communist Yugoslavia.

After that was a church in Wilmslow in Cheshire and then back up north to Lancaster, just south of the Lakes. It was the wrong side of Pennines but with beautiful countryside all around and also access to Swaledale. There they purchased Hill Top, a large old farmhouse right at the top of the dale with a commanding view down the valley.



Old buildings, especially ones so open to the fiercest of weather, require maintenance. Here Rowena's practical skills came to the fore. If an electrical circuit needed fixing she would be there with screwdriver and pliers. Painting walls, sorting plumbing - she would turn her hand to pretty well everything.

The dale and its people were important to her for the rest of her life and is why, in a couple of days, she will be taken north to be buried in the churchyard of tiny village called Keld

Lancaster was also a turning point in that, with her children grown, she began to teach at local school. A post as Head of Maths was soon followed by that of Deputy Head.

For the last time Robert had a calling to a new church, Pond Square in Highgate, and she gave up her work to follow him south.

It seemed an unlikely place to find them both but they made it their home for four decades. At this time she was always ready to help out our families, whether in response to requests for emergency childcare, accountancy, project management or an extra pair of hands to fit a kitchen. She found a teaching post in Blackheath and there were always trips to Swaledale. She and Robert were instrumental in the setting up of Pathway, a charity working with local churches and schools on the religious education of children. It is a testament to the foundations on which it was built that Pathway is still flourishing decades later and was always close to her heart. There is a leaflet about Pathway beside your Order of Service and it is good to have Ashley, Team Leader, here with us today. On Robert's retirement they stayed on as Church Members at Pond Square and Rowena became an Elder.

She had always been robust and energetic but in the last couple of years her health began to suffer - not surprising as she was in her 90s. Her spirit of independence remained however. Hospital didn't suit and in her first stay she was something of a menace on the ward through her efforts to escape back home. And that was perhaps her final achievement. On January 21st, peacefully, with no pain or distress and with Robert her husband of 70+ years with her in the room, she died at home.

That was quite a life."

• The Highgate Congregational Church

by Catherine Budgett-Meakin

Thoughts of a childhood brought up in a church

Coming to a service recently brought back so many memories of growing up in the Pond Square church.

We moved to Highgate West Hill in 1948, when I was two years old. My father, Denzil, a committed Congregationalist, joined the church. My mother, Kathleen, was an Anglican (my grandfather was a C of E priest his entire working life and I was brought up knowing a lot about her vicarage childhood and her twin sister wrote an account of their childhood outside Dover during the first World War). So I was brought up with a comfortable feeling about the two traditions.

But it was the Pond Square church that fills my memory: my father decided that it was up to me to choose if and when I should be christened. Once I had started at school (Northern Heights on Hampstead Lane, between North Grove and North Road), I came home asking why I hadn't been christened. I was christened on February 19th 1951 aged 4½. I can actually remember standing between my parents at the front of the church. And I still have the bible given to me that day.

My father became a Deacon and then the Revenue Steward (Sunday evenings saw him counting the money from the brown collection plates, ready for my mother to pay into Barclays Bank on Monday morning) and his contributions to the church are well covered in the book Highgate Dissenters.

I remember several Ministers during my childhood but the one whom I knew best was Jeffrey Plowman and his wife, Muriel. Jeffrey delivered a wonderful tribute to my father when he died suddenly in 1974 aged 73. By that time the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists had joined forces and were worshipping in the church opposite St Joseph's – now converted into flats. My father was very much involved in the discussion to join the two congregations.

The Plowman children were younger than I but one, Penny, has become a close friend, following the celebrations of 2009 when the church celebrated its 150th anniversary. The Plowman family turned up in force.

There was an active Children's Church with two wonderful women running it – run by Mrs King whose husband was the Church secretary and by Mrs Arundel. They organised wonderful nativities each Christmas – I started as the smallest angel and ended up as Herod! My deep voice probably played a part in my progress to the role of Herod. When I was 8 I was spotted by my parents using a small telescope to read the hymn numbers! This alerted them to the fact that I had inherited my father's short sight, not my mother's wonderful long sight!

I was taken to have my eyes tested and wore spectacles until 2019 when I had cataract surgery and now have long sight in my dominant left eye and reading sight in my right eye. A magical transformation for me. And no more specs!

Of course the church had wooden pews – grey, in three blocks. We always sat about half way down on the right, near the brass plaque to Peter Farquarson which was attached to the wall near our pew : “Other sheep I have which are not of this fold”. It is now in the apse to the left of the church. The organ was huge and filled the wall below the rose window. There were brown wooden pews for the choir to the right of the door which, having passed the wooden bellows for the organ (I suspect redundant by then) led to the minister’s vestry and a meeting room and to the stone steps down to the three halls: the big one which has been modernised and now houses many activities, notably the winter shelter.

There was a tiled floor to the hall at the bottom of the steps and the Middle Hall on the right, where the Missionary Supper was held every year – my mother doing the cooking. Ahead was a door to a draughty passage to the back of the site with the women’s lavatories and an old fashioned kitchen on the left. At the end was the End Hall – large and high with supporting beams across and lined by about 10 feet of stained wooden planks.

These halls were let out to various bodies and sometime – in the 1970s – were all burnt down.

There was an excellent children’s library at the north end of the main hall which I visited every week. The boiler room is still in its original position and I remember going early on a winter’s morning to turn on the heating and being terrified by what seemed like a black ghost waving in the draught. Of course it was the Minister’s cassock!



• Eco Article

We can all do a little bit

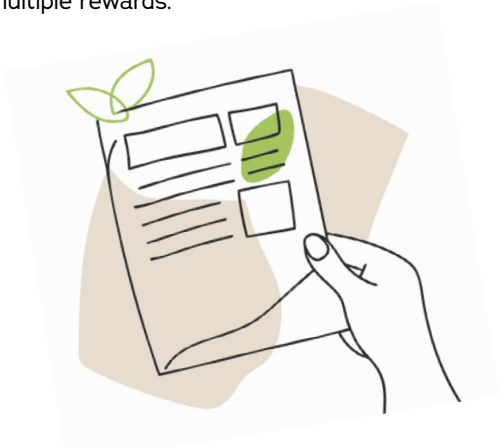
My role of PSC Eco contact has led to some wider reading including coming across this research and analysis paper 'National Security Assessment on Global Ecosystems' to set out the UK's own position, published in February 2026 by the Government. In the light of the degradation to many/all ecosystems across the natural world the paper considers our position up to a foreseeable 2050, and assumes this trend is highly likely to continue beyond. The paper is worth a read and makes sobering points but positively contains proposals for shaping our industries and lives ahead as we exist with this reality.

Veganism? Amongst many other headings, the report highlights high risk around the future supply of meat, dairy and eggs due to global environmental issues. Global factors will impact the UK market because we grow so little of our own grain, vegetables and fruit so these have to be imported at increasingly higher costs, as other countries are themselves facing climate change and disaster related issues.

The perceived knock on effect is that farmers in the UK will switch from meat, dairy & eggs to growing higher value foods or moving from farming into other sectors. If the price of meat, dairy and eggs increases as a result, the security assessment the paper recommends is developing more resilient and varied diets and incorporating veganism into our cooking repertoire which will also help with cutting down our carbon emissions significantly.

This report very much underscores the news being shared by investigative programmes widely across our media channels. It highlights the need for us to be growing our own food, grain etc in the UK and at scale, to increase availability and keep the costs down. Related to this and a completely different scale, it seems a timely Spring-time suggestion for those of us who have a garden or even a window sill to take the opportunity to grow our own and reap the multiple rewards.

Happy seed planting!



• Church Heating Update March 2026

Thank you to all who have given so generously towards the replacement of our unreliable and elderly boilers. We are now in receipt of £21,000 made up of donations and a £15,000 Congregational and General Trust grant, a good start which will also enable PSC to apply for grants which require some funding to be raised by the applicant.

Thames North grant process required a completed Energy Audit before they would consider a grant application - they also offered to pay for it. We went ahead and in February, received Brontide Consulting's Energy Audit evaluating the condition of the current heating system, the chapel's thermal characteristics, its energy consumption and the feasibility of standard upgrade options with the stated aim of improving resilience, reducing running costs and supporting the shared Thames North environmental commitments.

The Managers also asked Brontide to carry out an independent review of the PSC boiler replacement process, options and recommendations for both suitability and value. Energy Audit assessors, Brontide evaluation of the PSC boiler options was an unexpected and welcome gift and the conclusion that Viessmann boilers would be the best option affirmed. Brontide rationalised that installing new Viessmann gas boilers would provide higher energy efficiency, the installation would be straightforward using existing pipework and replacing the existing old chapel fan heaters with new would improve their efficiency. The system will be rapid heat response and more reliable, with an estimated carbon reduction of 20-25% in annual CO2 emissions compared to the existing. Even when downside issues surrounding continued reliance on fossil fuels, gas price fluctuations and moderate carbon emissions are considered, this is the best current improvement option for PSC.

Confirmation that this seems the right course of action is reassuring. Managers and Elders are currently appraising the best way to maintain heating if the one boiler option unexpectedly lets us down during the winter. It is anticipated that we will be able to make a decision on this shortly.

Helen Roe
Managers

• Poem

Spring

A yellow time,
an orange and a yellow time.

A blue time,
a mauve and blue time.

A climbing time,
a gripping and reaching-for-the-sun time.

A daffodil and cream time.

A white time,
a green and a white time.

A growth time,
a me and a you time.

© Dennis Evans,
Friend of Cherry Tree Wood

• 40 and Fabulous

Minister 40th Birthday Celebrations

A special birthday calls for a longer celebration than only one day!

The Community Lunch crowd helped Jonathan eat the lovely birthday cake made by our lunch cook, Nikki. After Sunday worship Helen made a delicious Guinness birthday cake which was shared amongst the congregation.

More recently a happy evening was spent in the Angel where Jonathan was presented with an original oil painting by local artist Eugenia Alekseyev, a gift from the congregation and community lunch volunteers. The painting was inspired by a photograph taken by Jonathan one day on a number 43 bus.

In response to the generosity shown on so many levels, Jonathan commented, "All of you will never know how much of an impact you have had on my life by just being yourselves. Thank for you for making me feel the most alive I have in a long time."



• World Day Of Prayer 2026

'Lord help us be the answer to the prayers we pray'

At a recent gathering at All Saints Church on Talbot Road, members of the Churches Together in Highgate community came together for their 2026 service, celebrating unity, faith, and global fellowship. This year's meeting placed a special focus on Nigeria, highlighting the country's vibrant Christian traditions, culture, and the experiences of its churches. Through shared worship, prayer, and reflection, the service offered those attending a chance to learn more about Nigeria while strengthening the bonds between local congregations in Highgate.



The service followed the 2026 World Day of Prayer order of service, joining congregations worldwide in a shared act of worship prepared this year by Christian women from Nigeria. The liturgy included Bible readings, prayers, reflections, and music that drew on Nigerian culture and Christian tradition, offering worshippers a glimpse into the faith and daily lives of people in the country. Through personal stories, symbolic actions, and moments of prayer for communities facing hardship, the service encouraged those gathered to reflect on themes of justice, unity, and hope. By participating in the same order of service used around the world, the congregation at All Saints was reminded that their prayers were part of a global movement of worship, linking churches and communities in faith and solidarity.

• Spire Repair Project Update 2026



In Feb 2025, the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF) approved the PSC grant application for costs associated with obtaining a detailed spire survey, assembling a quotation package based on this information, researching suitable stonemason contractors and obtaining competitive quotes from them for the repair and restoration works identified in the survey information. The final part is to nominate a suitable contractor to carry out the works. Once NHLF have received this information, they implied that repair work funding would be available. Receiving funding to obtain tender prices has been enormously beneficial as has working with the focussed professional charity understanding organisation we have discovered NHLF to be.

The quotes received from three contractors fell into two camps, rope access and scaffold based repairs. Although rope access was quicker, cheaper and appeared more efficient, both managers and elders felt that to achieve a better and long lasting outcome scaffolding was preferable. Scaffolding will allow for easier inspections, facilitate new stonework installation and be good for public visibility as well as being an obvious place to display NHLF involvement. Scaffolding comes with a greater cost and will take longer than the rope access approach.

The Elders and Managers will be suggesting proceeding with the 8-12 week long scaffold based repairs contractor, the cheapest quote after the rope access quotes are discounted.



NHLF grant making terms stipulate that the cheapest price does not automatically have to be selected, giving PSC the freedom to select what is considered the best option. The process has taken a little longer than originally intended to reach this point and if the NHLF are supportive of our stance, the spire repair works should commence in the early autumn.

Helen Roe
Managers

• Dates for the diary

MARCH 2026

Thur 19th 11.00 am
Informal Bible Study.
Noon Community Lunch till 13.30 pm.

Fri 20th 12.30 pm
Meditation via Zoom.

Sun 22nd 10.30 am
Morning Worship.

Thur 26th 11.00 am
Informal Bible Study.
Noon Community Lunch till 13.30 pm.

Fri 19th 12.30 pm
Meditation via Zoom.

Sun 27th 10.30 am
Morning Worship.



APRIL 2026

Thur 2nd 11.00 am
Noon Community Lunch till 13.30 pm.

Fri 20th Good Friday
Churches Together in Highgate walk of witness. We meet at 9.30 am at All Saints, Talbot Rd, and set off by about 9.50 am. We should arrive in Pond Square around 10.30 am where refreshments will follow a joint service. Join us for the walk, the service, or both!

Sun 5th 10.30 am
Easter Sunday Morning Worship.

Thur 9th 11.00 am
Informal Bible Study.
Noon Community Lunch till 13.30 pm.

Fri 10th 12.30 pm
Meditation via Zoom.

Sun 12th 10.30 am
Morning Worship.
The service will include communion.

Thur 16th 11.00 am
Informal Bible Study.
Noon Community Lunch till 13.30 pm.

Fri 17th 12.30 pm
Meditation via Zoom.

Sun 19th 10.30 am
Morning Worship.

Thur 23rd 11.00 am
Informal Bible Study.
Noon Community Lunch till 13.30 pm.

Fri 24th 12.30 pm
Meditation via Zoom.

Sun 16th 10.30 am
Morning Worship.

Thur 30th 11.00 am
Informal Bible Study.
Noon Community Lunch till 13.30 pm.

MAY 2026



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| Fri 1st Meditation via Zoom. | 12.30 pm | Sun 17th Morning Worship. | 10.30 am |
| Sun 3rd Morning Worship. | 10.30 am | Thur 21st Informal Bible Study. Noon Community Lunch till 13.30 pm. | 11.00 am |
| Thur 7th Little Village Donation Drive. 11 am No Informal Bible Study. Noon Community Lunch till 13.30 pm. | 10.00 am | Fri 22nd Meditation via Zoom. | 12.30 pm |
| Fri 8th Meditation via Zoom. | 12.30 pm | Sun 24th Morning Worship. | 10.30 am |
| Sun 10th Morning Worship. The service will include communion. | 10.30 am | Thur 28th Informal Bible Study. Noon Community Lunch till 13.30 pm. | 11.00 am |
| Thur 14th Informal Bible Study. Noon Community Lunch till 13.30 pm. | 11.00 am | Fri 29th Meditation via Zoom. | 12.30 pm |
| Fri 15th Meditation via Zoom. | 12.30 pm | Sun 31st Morning Worship. | 10.30 am |





Pond Square
Chapel



Since 1859, the chapel has hosted worship, community groups, family activities and more. We want to offer a warm welcome for years to come.

Can you help us stay warm?

We need to replace the boilers in Spring 2026



Please support
our JustGiving
campaign



£100,000

£75,000

£50,000

£25,000

£0

