

Dear Parents/Carers and Students,

Welcome to this Christmas edition of our Newsletter; it is a privilege to have the opportunity to share with you some of the wonderful experiences that our students have enjoyed and have participated in since the start of this new academic year.

It has been an incredibly successful first two terms of the 2023/24 school year with our students positively embracing all aspects of school life. Pupils have enjoyed a wide variety of opportunities outside of lesson time, complimenting the excellent education that our dedicated staff have provided in regular curricular time. Across this newsletter you will hopefully get a flavour of the additional experiences that we have provided for our students.

Our mission to support those less fortunate than ourselves through our school values of 'Service to Others' and 'Inspired by Christ', has been extremely evident throughout the first two half terms and in particular across the period of advent, through our school council-inspired Christmas Shoebox appeal, our Festive Wear Day and our Christmas Fayre. For our Christmas Shoebox appeal, students of all ages generously donated gifts and we were able to collect enough gifts to fill a record 125 shoeboxes, which our school council and 6th formers lovingly decorated prior to them being collected by a tremendously grateful representative of the Salvation Army. Our Festive Wear Day and Christmas Fayre raised over £2000 for Cafod and The Sanctuary (a charity supporting the homeless in Gravesend). Congratulations and thank you to everyone who played their part with these fantastic causes.



Examination results continue to go from strength to strength in the school; I am delighted to say that we recently had confirmation that our Year 11 cohort from 2023 gained an excellent **Progress 8** score of **+0.33** (Progress 8 being the government's primary measure of school performance). To put this figure into context, for every examination entered by our Year 11s in May and June of this year, our pupils achieved on average one third of a grade higher in every single exam that they undertook when compared to a typical UK school. Additionally, and perhaps most impressive of all, this outcome places St John's in the top 20% of all secondary schools nationally – a superb outcome; well done to the Year 11 students of 2023.

I am also delighted to report that the school is once again heavily oversubscribed for Year 7 September 2024 places and early indications suggest that this will also be the case for Year 12, demonstrating the high esteem in which the school continues to be regarded across the local community. This is a wonderful testimony to our student and staff body, and bodes extremely well for the future prosperity and stability of our school.

It has been absolutely wonderful to welcome our Headteacher Mr Barron back to the school on a number of occasions in recent weeks; the entire school community has been keeping Mr Barron in their thoughts and prayers across the past few months and we have all missed him dearly. We all wish Mr Barron the very best for the remainder of his recovery and we are all looking forward to him being on site more and more as we move into the New Year.

Finally, thank you for all of your continued support of the school; it is truly appreciated. I hope that you and your loved ones have a Happy and Holy Christmas, and I look forward to welcoming the students back to school in the New Year.

Mr Walton, Associate Head Teacher



Message from Mr Barron

Dear Parents/Carers and Students,

Welcome one and all to the December issue of our Newsletter. Firstly, many thanks for the countless well wishes that I have received since my accident in June; it has been a challenging six months for my family and I, however, we have all been buoyed by the love and support that we have felt from the entire St John's community, as well as from the knowledge that you have kept us all in your thoughts and prayers; I have no doubts that they have made a hugely positive difference to my recovery.

I am pleased to say that I have now left hospital and have felt well enough to visit St John's over these past few weeks as I continue to recuperate and build up my strength. I am awaiting on one final operation in the new year (so that I don't have to continue to wear my skateboarding helmet!) and then I can complete my recovery and return to St John's full time; that is the plan.

It has been wonderful to return to school recently – the students have been so welcoming and genuinely pleased to see me, and it's clear that thanks to the hard work of the St John's staff under the leadership of Mr Walton, the school has continued to flourish in my absence.

Finally, thank you once again for all of your wonderful support throughout these last 6 months, and let me take this opportunity to wish you all the very best for this Christmas period; I sincerely hope that you and your loved ones are able to make the most of this very special time of year.

Matt Barron
Headteacher

A Huge Thank you to the Ricki Neil-Jones Gift of Golf Foundation.

St John's would like to say a heartfelt thank you to the RNJ-Gift of Golf Foundation for their generous support of our hugely successful Summer School programme that took place in August. The foundation funded the programme and in doing so gave our students a wonderfully enriching opportunity.

The foundation was established in memory of Ricki Neil-Jones, and focuses on supporting vulnerable children particularly those going through difficult personal circumstances. Ricki was a professional golfer, who enjoyed teaching after passing his PGA Qualification. Ricki was also a former St John's student. The foundation continues Ricki's memory by supporting children through learning the techniques and discipline of golf alongside a range of other enriching activities. Through these activities, children are able to build teamwork skills, as well as develop their own self-confidence and resilience.

We are extremely grateful for the ongoing funding that we have received from the RNJ foundation and we are delighted that our students continue to benefit from the generous support received from the foundation.

Remembrance

On 7th November, St John's School remembered those who lost their lives in the 1st and 2nd World Wars and all other conflicts since then in our Whole School Assembly. The assembly was created and led by our sixth form students.

We were honoured to have the Deputy Lord Lieutenant, the Deputy Mayor, The President of the Royal British Legion and The Chairman of the Royal British Legion in attendance, alongside standard bearers from the Royal British Legion and the Royal Engineers Association. The assembly was a fitting way to remember those who died and all students were incredibly reverential and respectful.

In addition, the Denton Memorial service was held on 10th November with wreaths and roses being laid by students from St John's Primary School, St John's Catholic Comprehensive School and Gravesend Grammar School in memory of the 13 men from the Denton Parish who lost their lives in the 1st World War. Roses were also laid in memory of George Batts, founder member of the Normandy Memorial Trust and long-time friend and supporter of St John's, and Mr Colm Murphy, much loved and greatly missed History teacher. The service was attended by dignitaries, Royal British Legion Standard bearers and other guests.



At the Remembrance Sunday Service at Windmill Hill Mr Walton and 2 students laid a wreath on behalf of the school. There were many other students from St John's and other local schools in attendance representing the Scouts and Cadet Forces.

Mrs L Buckingham. *Year 8 Pastoral Manager.*

Gymnastics Success

On Sunday 3rd December 2023, St John's Gymnastics Squad participated in the Regional event of the Milano Team Trio competition at Tormead School in Guildford. We entered 10 teams into this event, and 5 of them have gained a place at the National Finals in Stoke-on-Trent in March 2024 to represent St John's and the South East Region.

Well done to everyone who took part, especially to those for whom it was their first competition experience.



Under 19 Boys	Diogo, Gustas, Yuvraj	1 st – through to National Finals
Under 16 Boys	Richard, Raphael, Francis	3 rd place
Under 13 Boys	Zion, Shaydon, George	2 nd – through to National Finals
Under 19 Mixed 1	Erikas, Bruno, Molly	1 st – through to National Finals
Under 16 Mixed	Holly, Diana, Fabio	1 st – through to National Finals
Under 13 Mixed 1	David, Nadia, Imogen	1 st – through to National Finals
Under 13 Mixed 2	Lucas, Jenelle, Melissa	3 rd place
Under 16 Girls Regional	Hannah, Eva, Laicee	5 th place
Under 13 Girls Regional 1	Mya, Ivy, Ava	5 th place
Under 13 Girls Regional 2	Isla, Evie, Nicole	6 th place

The Gymnastics Squad's next event is the Regional event of the Team Floor and Vault competition, which takes place at Aberdour School in Surrey on Sunday 28th January 2024. Good luck to all those taking part in that competition.

Mrs L Weller. *Assistant Headteacher (Teaching & Learning).*



Art Department

John Downton Awards

We were absolutely delighted when 8 of our students were selected to exhibit their work at this year's 2023 John Downton Art Awards. The John Downton award for young Artists is an annual exhibition which encourages and celebrates the creativity of Kent's young artists. It is open to students aged 11 to 18 from schools and colleges across Kent. The exhibition commemorates the life and work of John Downton, the celebrated Kent artist, poet and philosopher.

In particular we would like to give huge congratulations to Upkeerat B who won the Bronze award and Charley K who won the Silver award.

The exhibition is held at County Hall in Maidstone and is currently open to the public into the New Year.

Well done to you all and many thanks to all of our students who entered their work, it is a great achievement for our young artists to have their work shown at such a prestigious exhibition.



Christmas Card Designs

The school council had the brilliant idea to give every student in the school a Christmas card with the message 'Thankyou for your kindness and support'. The cards were designed by members of the Year 8 art club. The designs were created by the following artists:

Sandra P. Year 12 (Corporate School Card)

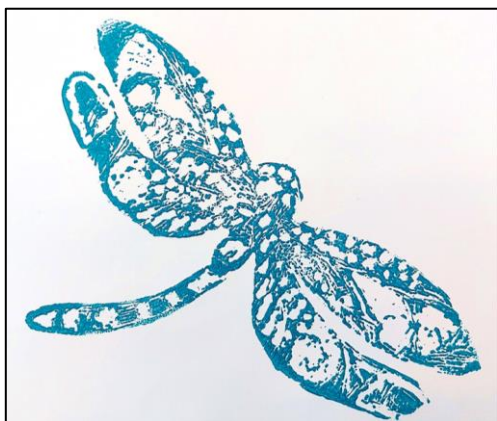
Ula R. Year 8
Bryony W. Year 8
Hannah G. Year 8
Jasmine T. Year 8
Julia S. Year 8
Kornelius S. Year 8
Lacey S. Year 8
Louis N. Year 8
Ruby W. Year 8

Students have been encouraged to write a kind message to a student or adult and post their card in the Christmas box on the stage. The school council will then deliver them.



Mrs D Lal. *Art and Design Technician*

Beautiful Print Creation



This image shows a beautiful print made by a partially sighted Year 7 student. This student was kindly assisted by two other Year 7 students in making the 'plate' and by myself with the printing. We are all very proud of this wonderful creation.

Mrs L. Gabriel. Art Teacher

Christmas Party

The St John's Christmas Party was a great success, thanks to Mrs Matthews, Miss Gosling and the students. The students studying the Food Technology and Jamie Oliver courses prepared sandwiches, sausage rolls, mince pies and cakes. Sixth form students made and served teas 7 coffees.

The guests included Mrs Rosemary Diamond DL and Dr Vasudevan DL, the Mayor and Mayoress of Gravesham, Veterans, Sisters from the local convent, councillors and retired staff. It was also lovely to see Mr and Mrs Barron in attendance.

Mrs L Buckingham. *Year 8 Pastoral Manager.*

Festive Food

Students have been taking part in a range of festive practical lessons in the Food Department this term. Practical lessons have included:

- Year 7 - festive scone wreaths
- Year 8 - spiced enriched breads
- Year 9 - spiced cookies and mini Christmas cakes
- BTEC - festive sausage rolls and crinkle cookies
- GCSE - chocolate yule log and winter berry tarts
- Level 3 - savoury bread wreaths, stollen and spiced decorated cookies.
- Year 12 enrichment - decorated cupcakes



As you can see we have had some brilliant dishes created. A special well done to our Year 9 enrichment classes for their wonderfully decorated mini Christmas cakes - in particular Sylar, Adriana, Madiha and Grace, whose cakes are shown (to the right)

We hope you all have a very Merry Christmas!
Miss Gosling and Mrs Matthews. *Food & Nutrition Department*

Italy History Trip

Our recent school trip to Italy was an absolute success! The itinerary included visits to Rome, Sorrento, and Montecassino, with highlights such as the Coliseum, the Vatican (including the Vatican Museum and Sistine Chapel), Montecassino Abbey, and the archaeological site of Pompeii.

The students' exemplary behaviour added to the enjoyment, and it was evident they benefited greatly from this educational adventure. A trip to remember! Their genuine interest and curiosity were shown throughout and undoubtedly contributed to the educational value of the trip.

Thank you to all staff and students who attended this visit to Italy, it was a truly wonderful experience.

Mr S Khan. *Assistant Headteacher (Key Stage 3 Leader)*



School's Climate Assembly

In October, A Level Geography students attended the annual School's Climate Assembly at King Edward VII School in Birmingham. The keynote speakers were BBC's Chris Packham and Hamza Yassin. The students were involved in workshops geared towards sustainability and to consider 'what's next'? This event gave the students an opportunity to put their learning into practice and discuss some of the ecological key issues of the day with their peers.

Mr B Thilthorpe. *Head of Geography*

Sport

It has been another jam-packed term for sports again here at St John's. Students have competed for the school in football, netball, gymnastics, climbing, table tennis, rowing and rugby.

Highlights include the U19s Football team going on a winning streak and currently pushing for the top of their league table, 5 gymnastic teams getting through their most recent competition to gain a spot at the National Championships later this academic year, and St John's winning the first ever indoor climbing district tournament!

Well done to all those who have taken part and have been involved in our sporting success this term.

Mr R Kyle. *Head of PE*

Football

The Year 7 football team has taken part in various Kent Cup matches visiting Meopham School and Orchard Academy in Swanley. Training has taken place every Wednesday after school for Year 7 boys and girls, who have been developing their skills and team ethos.

For the first away fixture to Meopham School, the result did not go in St. John's favour with the boys coming away with a significant defeat. However, the boys had their first victory winning against Orchard Academy 1-0. This was a tough match with Antoni M (7AOA) playing in goal and managing to keep the ball out of the net. However, within the last five minutes of the game, the boys managed to score one goal to put St. John's in the lead. The feedback from the teachers at both Meopham School and Orchard Academy was extremely positive as the Year 7s demonstrated a strong catholic ethos within the game as there were no fouls or poor play and the boys were both polite and thankful to our hosts.

A real highlight in KS3 is the termly Year 7 vs Year 8 football match. In term 1, the Year 8s produced a convincing win over the Year 7s. However, in term 2, the Year 7s worked hard as a team and were able to take the lead winning the game 3-1. The Year 7s and Year 8s would like to thank Luis Newby (10JGD) who acted as referee for the first match demonstrating his skills and maturity as a qualified referee. Also, we would like to thank Mr. Khan who refereed the second match (whilst wearing his suit).

There will be plenty of future football fixtures for the Year 7s and the boys are hoping to progress to the next stages of the Kent Schools Cup.

Mr E Sumner. *Head of Year 7.*

Performing Arts

Frozen the musical

Year 8 made their way to London for a once in a lifetime experience.

Selected students from Year 8 boarded the train and headed into London for a workshop with professional actors from Disney. They were able to explore sections of the Frozen script and put their own unique spin on the scenes.

After lunch in Covent Garden students entered the magical world of Arendelle and got immersed in the wonderful story of Anna and Elsa and how their bond can survive all sorts of trials. Students were able to watch as their favourite childhood film came to life and the amazing ways a theatre can explore a magical world.



Miss C Comiskey. *Drama Teacher*

Criminology

Tour of The Royal Courts of Justice and The Old Bailey Court



On the 12th September the Criminology Department took our current Year 13 criminology students on a tour of the Legal Courts in London. Students visited the Royal Courts of Justice (as pictured) and The Old Bailey – the Central Criminal Court in London, where students entered the public galleries to watch live trials take place.

The day started with a tour of the Royal Courts of Justice by an experienced criminal journalist who gave them the insights into trials that have taken place and how the Criminal Justice System works in England and Wales. They then were led to the Lincoln's Inn, the training and workplace of Barristers

and Lawyers in London. Finally, they made their way to the Old Bailey Courts where they entered the public galleries for the afternoon sitting of court. Students watched parts of 3 murder trials that were taking place. They witnessed the court giving evidence, pathology reports, witness testimony from the police, CCTV footage and case overviews. All these key parts of the trial and investigation process are elements studied in their current Level 3 Unit, Crime Scene to Courtroom.



Students enjoyed the day and found it so fascinating to be in a live trial watching it all unfold in front of them. Students said: "I thought the tour and sitting in on court cases were both very interesting. I thought it was helpful for my Criminology course as I got to see what a court looked like in real life (not just from films or tv dramas), being able to sit in on current cases and being able to pick out the different roles of the court." (Drew S, Year 13)

"I have always wanted to see a criminal case in front of my own eyes, and the Old Bailey made that dream come true for me. We observed 3 different trials and got an insight into how the court processes work. Every case I had witnessed were murder trials, which evokes sympathy in itself, and allowed me to get a first-person perspective of this trial which isn't something you would get if not for visiting the Old Bailey. Despite the fact that phones or electronics we not allowed in the courthouse to capture the beauty of the inside, it was still a delight to have visited. All the staff were friendly and helpful and made the trip less stressful. it is a place I will be visiting again in the future as it was an incredible experience." (Farrah K, Year 13)

Students were of exemplary behaviour all day and were a credit to not only the Criminology Department but to the school. The department will be running this visit again in the future for our future students so they too can experience one of the best opportunities a young person can have, to see our Legal System first-hand at one of the most famous courts in the world.

Miss L Cutting. Criminology Teacher

Transition

History

On Wednesday 16th June, both Year 7 Transition classes ventured out of school for a day of new experiences, discoveries, and some time to socialise. It was a day when everyone saw how school subjects and topics overlap. English, Geography, History, and Mathematics were all obviously encountered during the excursion, but they had a good scattering of life skills their too.

The day started with a stroll from school to the ferry terminal in the town via the prom. From the prom, they could see our destination on the north bank and recognise the prom's long association with leisure.



At the pontoon, our tiny vessel awaited us. Some were unsure about the wisdom of boarding, but once each student had purchased their ticket and taken a seat, they enjoyed the ten-minute crossing. Landing safely in Essex, we left the jetty via a walkway illustrating the lives of those who had previously landed in Tilbury from an extremely significant historical vessel known as the Windrush. Tilbury Fort was only a short walk away and it offered the students a chance to explore centuries of history in the English Heritage site.

The long history and changing usage of the fort were evident. The students were appropriately spooked by the tunnels, intrigued by the guns and a little surprised by the precautions taken with the kegs of gunpowder. It was a hot day so some were relieved to be suitably cooled by the availability of ice-cream in the small shop.

The students had a great day and were excellent ambassadors for the school.


Experiencing Art and More



Year 7 and 8 Transition classes were given the opportunity to explore the world of classic art on the 27th of April 2023. We travelled to London Charing Cross on the train from Gravesend to explore the National Gallery.

The students were given a selection of pictures of famous paintings; room numbers and the name of the artist. They were asked to locate as many of the paintings as they could in the maze of rooms that makes up the gallery. All groups successfully located a fair number of these priceless works and each student clearly developed personal responses to them. Most even completed the alphabet challenge of items

seen in the gallery too. Some were surprised by the canvas sizes whilst other in awe of the colours and the lack of apparent brush marks on some. Most were confused by Quentin Matsys' painting called the Ugly Duchess too. The majority left aware that seeing copies of the pictures was nothing like the originals hanging on the walls before them as they had an extra dimension to them.



We had time to picnic under the watchful eye of Nelson on his column before our return. The weather was great for that, but it made the walk from the station back to the school a tiring one. It was a successful day of learning – and not just about art.

As always, the students were a credit to the school, themselves, and their families. It was a pleasure to accompany them.

Mr P Coode. *Head of Transition*

Sixth Form

The sixth form have taken part in a number of successful activities this year.

Construction Youth Trust (Year 13) – This was a visit to Pinsent Masons which is a global law firm on 13th December. This was to explore how law in the city works and also to take part in mock interviews with the law firms recruitment team.

Canterbury Christ Church University (Year 12 and 13) - On the 10th November a number of students took an active part in a variety of workshop sessions. These sessions covered education, healthcare, criminology, forensics and engineering. Students engaged with a range of workshops and activities within their chosen field and gained a valuable insight into life at CCCU.

Greenwich University Workshops - These workshop sessions took place on the school site on 24th November specifically for Extended Project Qualification students and also select Year 13 students. The focus of the sessions was based around university academic skills. Students experienced workshops on writing, research, and presentation skills to enable them to prepare for university life. Attendance to three of the five workshops was required for scholarship eligibility.

Greenwich University Workshops – These additional workshops took place on 8th December on school site for select Year 12 students. The workshops focused on leadership, resilience and coping with exam stress to help students prepare for upcoming exams and university life. Attendance to three of the five workshops was required for scholarship eligibility.

Landsec Mentoring – A number of Year 13 students attended the Bluewater Learning Centre to work with the recruitment teams and various managers from within the Bluewater corporate field. Students learnt about interview techniques, CV tips, and elevator pitches with the recruitment teams.

Bellway Site Visit– in October a number of Year 11 and 13 students explored a live construction site in Ebbsfleet, learning about the various stages of building construction and about apprenticeship routes available.

Mr T Self. *Deputy Year 12/13 Leader*



Safeguarding

Dear Parents and Carers,

Please find below some information from the welfare team at St John's. We wish you all a restful and peaceful Christmas.

The Wellbeing Ambassadors attended 'The Big Mental Health Conversation' on the 10th of October at the Detling showground.

As part of the event the pupils had to attend several workshops. They took part in a range of activities including:

- Mindfulness with Alpacas – where the students got to go outdoors and meet the animals
- Pawsitive minds – the pupils got to walk the therapy dogs while talking about mental health
- Improving your sleep – pupils learnt what is needed for a good night sleep and how it impacts on your mental health
- BeYou crafty creations – where they did crafts and learnt how that improves our mental health.
- 5 ways to wellbeing warriors – Simple strategies that can strengthen your mood.

The pupils thoroughly enjoyed the day and are looking to put some of these strategies into practice across the whole school in the New Year.

A group of Year 11 pupils had the opportunity to visit the Ben Kinsella trust in London on the 13th of November. The trust was set up in memory of Ben Kinsella. Ben was 16 years old and went out one evening to celebrate the end of his GCSE exams. Whilst he was out, he was tragically stabbed to death in a horrific act of senseless violence over an incident that had nothing to do with him. The trust educates young people in the dangers of knife crime and helps them to make positive choices and to stay safe. The knife crime prevention workshops follow the journey of both the victim and the offender through a series of unique and immersive experiences. They show young people how the choices they make, and the consequences of those choices, are intrinsically linked. The pupils who attended will be feeding back their learning to the rest of the Year 11 cohort.


For Parents - What are Social Media Scams?

With online scams on the rise worldwide, particularly at this time of year, it's important we are all aware of what scams are, the common types of scams and helpful tips. Internet Matters have a great information page for parents with lots of useful information. You can find all the information on the following website:

<https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/online-money-management-guide/social-media-scams-advice-guide-to-support-young-people>

KOOTH

This is a free, anonymous, online mental health service. THEY offer one-to-one text-based counselling, pre-moderated peer support forums and activities, and tools and resources to support young people.



In partnership with the NHS, they provide immediate access to safe and effective mental wellbeing support – no costs, no barriers, no thresholds.

In their safely moderated community, everyone is welcome. No problem is too big or too small – all young people deserve a space in which they feel safe.

Please have a look at their website: <https://www.kooth.com>

Kent Resilience Hub

The Kent Resilience Hub have created a resource that helps young people, parents and carers, to understand emotional wellbeing and resilience. Please see the link below for more information.

<https://kentresiliencehub.org.uk/supporting-your-child>

Anna Freud resources

The Anna Freud centre has advice and guidance for parents and carers to help them support a child or young person experiencing poor mental health and wellbeing.

Please see the link below for more information

<https://www.annafreud.org/resources/family-wellbeing/>

Mrs O Kelham. *Senior Assistant Headteacher (Safeguarding and Child Protection)*

Chaplain's Corner

It hardly seems possible that Christmas 2023 is upon us already. Time seems to have travelled at the speed of light since the heady days of September sun.

All of a sudden we are awash with Christmas adverts telling us how to spend money. Various ways to lure us into our shops, from a singing Venus flytrap to Michael Buble crooning in the isles of another well-known store. Delivery vans on our roads have multiplied tenfold. Trees up and decorated, frantic gift buying, cards sent and some of us are looking forward to Christmas parties.

Let's face it, Christmas can feel manic!

I'm ashamed to say I allow myself to be seduced by a commercialist version of Christmas. I'm thinking back to the first week of November, the Year 11 Residential Retreat to Westminster Youth Service, Pinner. A wonderful weekend of reflection for not only our pupils but also for Mr Juma and myself. December, and I've allowed the craziness of 'tinsel and turkey' to seep into my subconscious, forgetting our amazing experience of that weekend.

The time spent with the youth team at Pinner allowed us time to reflect, to calm our hearts and focus on what is really important in our lives. A time for stillness and rest, a time to dream. Of course the weekend did not take on the form of Tibetan Retreat. There was plenty of time for activities, games and friendship. A camp fire to welcome us on our arrival after a day in London, was enthusiastically received by the pupils. Then after a good night's sleep the group embarked on a weekend of discovery. Who am I? Who and what is important to me? When life's storm hits me, do I have strong foundations to hold me up?



The Year 11 pupils who decided to attend made the weekend the blessing. All twenty pupils thoroughly enjoyed the retreat. To watch them all bond and take care of each other was truly humbling and heart-warming. They made sure no-one was left out and engaged in all activities with gusto - even leading prayer sessions by the end of our time with the centre.



Fast forward less than a month. The uplifting calm of the retreat is memory, not distant. It's just I have forgotten some of the peace and calm experienced over those truly magical few days.

Why is that Susanne, I hear you ask?

Pressures of life have a habit of putting themselves between the happiness and calm Jesus wants for us. I witnessed this as the pupils attending the retreat launched themselves into mock GCSE exams on their return. Thankfully, all at some point, have visited the chapel during recent weeks to remind themselves they are masterpieces, perfection and all made in God's image. More than an exam grade.



They have found a way of calming the storms in their lives. Are we all able capable of following their example?

This Advent and Christmas season, here is my challenge to you all. Should you choose to accept it?

Take time to focus on the true meaning of Christmas. Think about the simple perfection of The Nativity. Mary and Joseph had no need of earthly riches on that night. All they needed was the kindness of a stranger and a safe place to settle. A stable, full of animals and the smells that come with that! They put their faith in God to provide for them. The shepherds who were outcasts from society first to lay eyes of Jesus, God Incarnate. It may not seem to us the perfect way to welcome a baby into the world, however it was perfect for The Son Of God

Take time to find peace this Christmas. Peace for yourself in the simplicity of life. I ask you to pray for our suffering world, as so many of our brothers and sisters' lives crippled with hate, intolerance and conflict.

This Christmas take time to dream, to look inwards. What really makes you happy? I can assure you chasing around Bluewater with two days to Christmas is not my idea of peace, calm and happiness. When the storms of life threaten to rock your foundations, what keeps you upright? Reflect and renew. Take time to connect with family, friends, humanity. Time to connect with nature. Take time to connect with yourself, and with Christ.

May you and your families feel the peaceful love of Christ this Christmas.

God Bless.

Susanne Gibbons – Chaplain

A prayer for Christmas Eve

Loving Father,

Help us remember the birth of Jesus that we may share in the song of the angels

The gladness of the shepherds, and worship of the wise men.

Close the door of hate,

And open the door of love all over the world.

Let kindness come with every gift

And good desires with every greeting.

Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings,

And teach us to be merry with clear hearts.

May Christmas Eve bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts.

And Christmas morning make us happy to be Your children,

Send the peace, hope, joy and love of the Nativity to light up lives.

Amen.