Open Space

SAINT STEPHENS SOUNDWELL

KNOWING JESUS... MAKING JESUS KNOWN!

New Year with Jesus...

AND SO it is that the calendar has (finally!) flipped and we have begun a brand-new year.

LAST YEAR, 2025—with its mix of joys and sorrows, goals met and goals missed, friendships gained and friendships lost—is behind us.

For many, New Year's is just another holiday.

For others, it's a time of deep reflection, both on the past year and on the one ahead. For followers of Jesus, New Year's has no unique significance. There's no central biblical narrative informing our celebrations.

But this doesn't mean Christians shouldn't pause and reflect on the turning of the calendar. Moses asked of the Lord, *"Teach us to number our days, so we may get a heart of wisdom"* (PSALM 90:12).

Time: seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years; is a gift to us from a good God. To wisely follow him, then, is to redeem our time (EPHESIANS 5:16).

New Year's can also remind us of the new birth. In a sense, each day with Jesus is a chance to turn the page on an old way of life and embrace a new one.

We are, after all, new creation people, and we serve a King who renews us daily by the Holy Spirit.

Setting goals for a new year are an important sign that we're intentional about glorifying God in our callings; work and business, home and church, private and public witness.

When we work and plan, even in seemingly insignificant endeavours, we are fulfilling a God-given mandate: (GENESIS 1:28 = *"Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living things that moves upon the earth."*).

In this age, we're blessed with an abundance of resources to help us to maximize our time: digital tools, productivity experts, and inspirational blogs.

But before we write out our goals, we should begin in the heart.

The temptation for Christians is to make our plans and add a dollop of Jesus on top, rather than allowing him to form in us the desires and motivations to do his work.

So, whether or not we're making concrete goals or more abstract ones, whether we're writing down resolutions or foregoing them altogether, here are four important steps we can take, as we peer into 2026, to draw closer to Christ.

Continued overleaf>

JANUARY 2026

Mission Partners with St Stephens:

- Beloved
- Bristol City Centre Soup Run
- Bristol Schools Connection
- Christian Aid
- Community of the Sisters of the Church
- Emmaus
- Harvest for The Hungry
- Bristol Churches City Fund
- One25 Project

St Stephens

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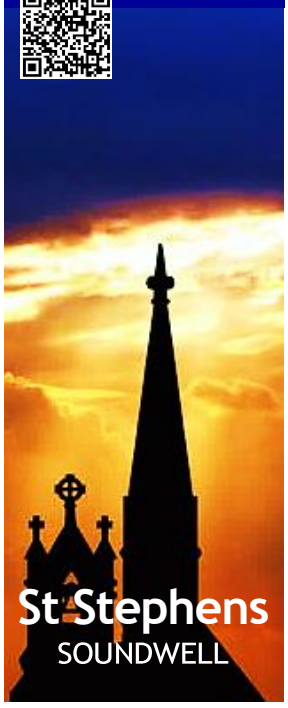
CHARITY NUMBER 1131503



New Year with Jesus...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

REMEMBER

The wise man of Ecclesiastes said, *"Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years draw near when you will say, 'I have no pleasure in them'"* (ECCLESIASTES 12:1).

In January, the year is young and the opportunities seem fresh.

So many productivity gurus preach a gospel of self-empowerment, but as gospel people, we know the fragility of human life. We know every breath is a miracle, a gift given to us by our Creator.

I love the words of hymnwriter Thomas Obediah Chisholm (1866-1960):

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

In a scared and tumultuous world, creation itself reminds us of God's great faithfulness. Every new season is a testimony, a signpost, to grace. So, the proper response to the past year, whether good or bad, is not 'I made it through' or 'Look what I achieved.' It is '**Thank you, Lord**.'

REPENT

Our worship of God for his faithfulness and majesty, evidenced by the changing of seasons, should then lead us to repentance.

His goodness breaks us in fresh ways as our sin is exposed by the light of his glory. But this isn't a morbidly introspective, navel-gazing exercise.

To repent is to rejoice.

We claim the promise of 1 John 1:9 ('If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness') because we know our forgiveness has already been purchased at the cross.

Beginning the New Year with repentance is to draw closer to Jesus, to appropriate the fresh grace that is ours in him.

This is why confession always brings relief and joy. It is the gateway to greater intimacy with God.

How can we begin new plans and journeys in 2026 without first allowing his light to penetrate the darkness of our hearts and to reveal areas in need of growth?

How can we start hustling and working and dreaming without first renewing our joy in the One who directs our steps?

RENEW

New Year's should also be a time of renewing old commitments, like marriage, family, and church. Before we begin grand plans to lose weight or develop a new skill —good creational goals—let's begin by renewing the core commitments we already have.

Our most vital work is what we do within the walls of our homes—loving our spouses, our children and the wider family in an atmosphere of godliness and grace.

We live out the gospel best when we live it out in the daily rhythms of repentance and forgiveness with loved ones.

We should also renew ourselves to the faithful body life of our church.

The local church is the focus of God's mission in the world, where we gather in community to declare Christ's kingship each week, and where we work out our 'salvation in fear and trembling' (PHIL 2:12) with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Commitments to marriage, family, and church don't always look or feel significant. But faithfulness in these core things over a long period is a radical, countercultural life.

They form the habits of a disciple and show the world what it looks like to be a Christian.

REST

New Year's should be a time to rest.

First, we rest in the reality of our identity in Christ. We may have failed to meet our heady goals in 2025. Jesus still loves us, despite our failures, unchecked boxes, and disappointment at the scale.

The gospel tells us that he loves us in the midst of these.

It's not the voice of your Saviour, but the whisper of the enemy that says you have less worth because you blew your resolutions.

A 'more successful 2026' will not make Jesus love you anymore.

He's the One, after all, who calls broken sinners and empowers them for his mission.

Failed apostles, former persecutors, recovering Pharisees—his body is full of them.

Second, we should plan to physically rest. We don't often do this on New Year's.

We plan to work and hustle. But do we schedule time to reflect and acknowledge our need for sleep and leisure?

Rest isn't a sign of laziness or weakness; it's a sign of spiritual strength and confidence that when we close our eyes, our lives are in the grip of a sovereign God.

To sleep is to say that we're not God and that the world can go on without us.

So, as we make our plans for 2026, let's remember that even in our failures, we serve the One who 'knows how we are made and remembers that we are dust' (PSALM 103:14).

We make plans, but we hold them lightly.

We entrust our future, not to our diaries or Google Calendar or to a reading list, but to the King who holds the world in his hands; for He is the Light and Salvation of the World!

Lisa x

Join us for

COFFEE/ CHAT & COMPANY

11AM WEDNESDAY 7th JANUARY

*at the **Turnpike** on Soundwell Road.*

A time to be, be known, and be together

WEDNESDAY Bible Chat

2.30PM

(2PM for a cuppa)

14 JANUARY

in the Church Room

28 JANUARY

in the Church sofa corner

BRING your Bible!

WEDNESDAY EVENINGS

7.15pm to 8.15pm

WE meet in the Church Room for anyone who wants to join in with simply reading the Bible!

Though the scriptures in the Bible are thousands of years old, they still hold immense power, wisdom and guidance for us today!

There is no set structure or any course work to worry about and **everyone** is welcome!

Community Chaplain

WE are delighted and overjoyed that Elaine has joined us as our Community Chaplain.

This role has been created to build on the existing ministry that was already taking place in the 5 schools within our Parish, with the local young people's groups in the Parish and the Youth and Families work in and around Church.

Our vision for the Community Chaplain is that, in time, through connections Elaine will forge, all the different places and organisations that support children, youth and families in the Parish will be linked to one another. Hopefully enhancing the ways they reach their own goals and aims for young people, and also bringing Jesus into the mix.

By being a visible presence in the community and around church life, Elaine, will be making Jesus known across the Parish.

Elaine has already had such an impact in this role; for which we are thankful and grateful to God working through her.

But we need your help too!!

So far, through applications to Grant Funding organisations, we have secured a good part of the funds needed to support this new role for the first year of a 3-year contract... but there is a shortfall, which your PCC has committed to meet.

This shortfall needs to be met through church funds.

We will continue to make further Grant Funding applications, but each Grant Funder will want to see how we, St Stephens Church, are joining them by making contributions towards the role; for both salary and on-going ministry costs involved.

Therefore, we, your Church, ask for your help to meet that shortfall and 'sponsor' the Community Chaplain role.

If this is something that God is nudging you to do, then please do speak with Lorraine or myself.

We can then listen to you and how you might like to do this.

Our thinking is that this could be done through regular or one-off financial gifts, but if you have other thoughts and ideas, we'd be pleased to hear about them.

Thank you and bless you.

Lisa

Tuesday 9 to 11.30am

13 & 27 JANUARY

Please note that under 17s must be accompanied by an adult).

IN OUR CHURCH ROOM

PRAYER Requests

IF you would like the St Stephens praying team to pray for you or someone you care about, please contact any of the following:

- Rev **Lisa Wigmore** *Vicar*
  Telephone 0117 9574297 or email: lisawigmore66@gmail.com
- Rev **Sandy Cooper**
  Associate Minister
  Telephone 0117 9672621 or email: linsand@blueyonder.co.uk
- Mrs **Jenny Bishop**
  Pastoral Co-ordinator
  Telephone 0117 9575729 or email: jenannb75@hotmail.com

IF you are requesting prayer for someone else, please seek their permission first.

IF you would like to be part of our Praying Team, then please do speak with Lisa.

Just so you are aware, all prayer requests are kept confidential – between you and God. *Thank you!*

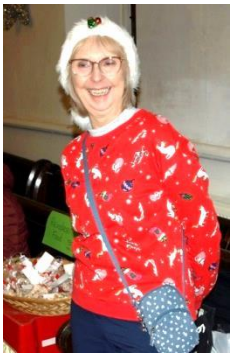
Christmas Fayre *in review*

ONCE again the Christmas Fayre was well attended and a few snapshots are presented here for the record for this issue of Open Space.

OVER **£2000** was raised for Church Funds!

Thanks to everyone who helped in any way with running stalls and selling all manner of items, and organising raffles and games etc. and organising and preparing the Church and the Church Hall and Church Room, and all who laboured in the kitchen too!

Below: a selection of Christmas jumpers and tops seen around the Church!



’twas the month before Christmas

DURING my sabbatical I got into the habit of writing poetry, just for me.

IT helps me reflect on God’s goodness and continuing presence; his being always and everywhere with me and of course with you.

Then, when I was preparing my sermon for Sunday 7th December 2025, I found myself recalling a poem from my childhood, and then couldn’t get it out of my mind.

So, it got me thinking that perhaps God was wanting me to write an alternative version of that poem for Advent 2 and the associated Gospel reading.

After I preached, a number of you contacted me and asked for a copy and to print it here in Open Space. So, to honour your requests, here it is. But first, why not read Matthew chapter 3, verses 1–12, so you know where I’m coming from.

Also, it might help to know that I tend to think of the Holy Spirit as more feminine in character, so I do refer to the Holy Spirit as ‘her’ during the last part of my poem.

Twas the month before Christmas, when all through God’s house
Not a heart was yet ready, ’cept the smallest church mouse;
For everyone focused on all that would come:
The turkey and trimmings and pud soaked with rum
God’s children were feeling all smug in their faith;
Forgetting the words of the prophets that scathe.
They’d decked all their halls for their plentiful guests
But had scarcely had time to pray or to rest.
When out in the desert there arose such a clatter,
The crowds went to see just what was the matter.
Away to the Scriptures I flew like a flash,
Tore open the pages for words to surpass.
A voice crying out to make his paths straight,
To seek God’s repentance, for Christ we should wait!
And then to my wondering eyes did appear,
A great vision of glory—God’s coming was near,
With angels and seraphs and gold ornament,
Not presents and crackers, but divine judgment.
More rapid than posties his warnings they came,
Will you all be ready when I call your name?
‘Now, June! Now, Geoff! Now Steve and Bill!
On, Fin! On, Marlene! On, Lorraine and Gill!
To those who are hungry! To those who are poor!
God’s kingdom is coming! Throw open the door’.
Go leave all your plans and follow my lead,
Stop trusting in baubles; Christ’s all that you need.
So out to the town and its people they flew
With their souls full of longing, for now that they knew
The task set before them was no wrapping, or mart
But a message to wait reaching deep in their heart.
So I lit up a candle, and with silence around,
Through the stillness God’s Spirit came in with a bound.
She was dressed all in peace, from her head to her foot,
I’d never have noticed if I’d not stopped to look.
A bundle of gifts she had flung on her back,
Love, Joy and Gentleness tucked in her sack.
Her gaze—how it sparkled! Her wisdom eternal!
I needed no words and so set down my journal.
In silence she told me that Advent was here,
A time to reflect that God’s coming is near,
Not shepherds and angels, a stable and kings
But judgment and kingdom, the eternal things.
Don’t spend all this time without giving a thought
To the tasks God has set you; not gifts to be bought.
The times yet to come will ask all that you have
If truly you’re ready for all that God gave
The guest who is coming is no Santa or elf,
But the true Word of God, dwelling within oneself.
Then love in my heart, and deep peace in my head
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread;
She spoke no more word, but went straight to her work,
And filled all God’s children; then turned with a jerk,
To look to her prophet, still waiting aside,
With a nod she did send him to where he did abide.
He took up his tunic, towards the great river’s flow
And on with his journey the Baptiser did go.
But I heard him exclaim, ere to wild’ness he went:

“Prepare the way for the Lord, and remember Advent!”

Rev Lisa Wigmore -
December 2025

TICKETS are available online at: www.ststephensdramabristol.co.uk or else telephone 0333 666 366.
St Stephens Church Hall, Soundwell, Bristol BS16 4RH.
29–31 January 7.30pm.

More about BUBBLE CHURCH!

AS YOU might already have heard, St Stephens is launching something really exciting in 2026 called Bubble Church!

THIS new initiative will build on our existing family and children's outreach by introducing a service created especially for families and their young children.

Bubble Church is a short, engaging church service designed for babies, toddlers, and young families.

Each 30-minute service includes action songs, a Bible story, puppets, and a simple hands-on activity.

There is also time either before or after the service to share breakfast or lunch, depending on when it runs.

The liturgy is simple and repeated weekly, helping children feel secure, confident, and fully involved.

Bubble Church will run as an additional Sunday service, starting once a month, with the hope of increasing this over time.

In the coming months, we will be reaching out to families to find out whether a morning or afternoon service would work best. Our aim is to be ready to launch by Easter 2026.

Our Community Chaplain, Elaine Brewster, will be leading the Bubble Church team and is currently gathering volunteers from within St Stephens to help launch this exciting new service.

Training will be provided, and we are looking for people to lead; to be puppeteers; to help with sound; people to welcome and to help serve in the kitchen.

All volunteers will be on a rota to ensure that they will not be needed for every service as a way of protecting everyone's time.

If, as you're reading this, you feel that Bubble Church might be something you would like to be involved in, please do speak to or contact or email Elaine:
elaineb.ststephens@gmail.com

Telephone: 07 902 095 915.

Many churches have seen new congregations grow through Bubble Church and have shared how it has been a wonderful way to welcome new children and families into church life. How wonderful would it be to see this here at St Stephen's – a growing community of families and children, and a safe, welcoming place where families can explore faith together and take ownership of their church life.

For more information and videos about Bubble Church, please visit their website:
www.bubblechurch.org/run

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS AT
WELCOME SPACE!

OUR wonderful catch up twice a month, and those who honour us with their presence range from 18 months to the fantastic 90s!

Our finale for the year was a great time had by all, chatting, laughing and eating yummy mince pies with cream topping.

All this was accompanied by Carols playing in the background.

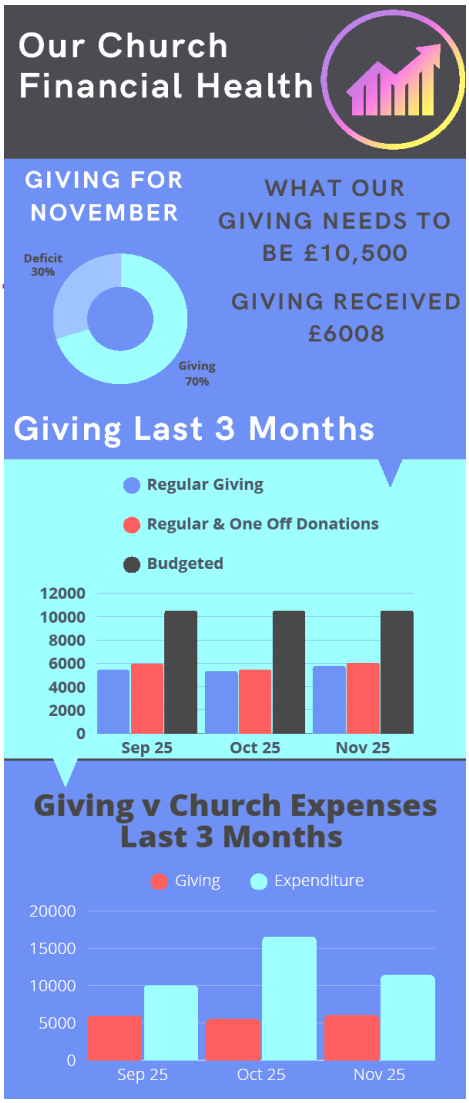
The time spent together is always very special in the knowledge that God is always amongst us, bringing us love and companionship.

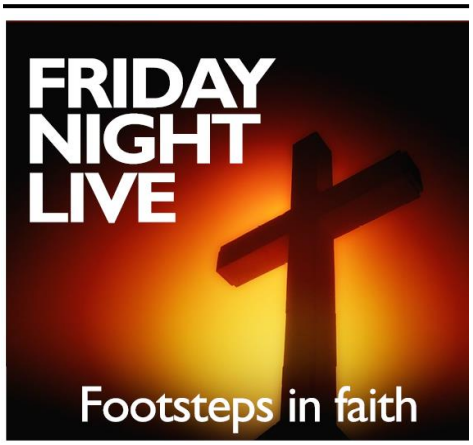
We all look forward to meeting up again in the New Year:

Tuesday 9 to 11.30am, 13th & 27th January.

Why not come along and join us!

Lorraine Sanderson





16th January

6.30PM in Church

INFORMAL WORSHIP FOR ALL AGES

READINGS & COLLECTS

SUNDAY 04 JANUARY
Epiphany

Isaiah 60:1–6; Psalm *72:1–15*
Ephesians 3:1–12; Matthew 2:1–12

CREATOR of the heavens, who led the Magi by a star to worship the Christ-child: guide and sustain us, that we may find our journey's end in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY 11 JANUARY
Baptism of Christ

Isaiah 42:1–9; Psalm 29
Acts 10:34–43; Matthew 3:13–end

HEAVENLY FATHER, at the Jordan you revealed Jesus as your Son: may we recognize him as our Lord and know ourselves to be your beloved children; through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

SUNDAY 18 JANUARY
2nd Sunday of Epiphany

Isaiah 49:1–7; Psalm 40:1–12
1 Corinthians 1:1–9; John 1:29–42

ETERNAL LORD, our beginning and our end: bring us with the whole creation to your glory, hidden through past ages and made known in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY 25 JANUARY
3rd Sunday of Epiphany
Conversion of Paul

Jeremiah 1:4–10; Psalm 67
Galations 1:11–16a;
Matthew 19:27–end

GOD of all mercy, your Son proclaimed good news to the poor, release to the captives, and freedom to the oppressed: anoint us with your Holy Spirit and set all your people free to praise you in Christ our Lord. Amen.

JANUARY CYCLE OF PRAYER *BEGINNING SUNDAY OF EACH WEEK*

04	Baptism Preparation	Jackie Clench, Sandra Conway Maggie Cook, Sandy and Lin Cooper Teresa, Robert, Benjy & Jacob Cooper	The Gardens The Green The Haven
11	Marriage Preparation	Marlene Crew, Ruth Crosby Iris Davis, Ros Davis Jean Denley, Margaret Dodge	The Reddings The Ride The Wickets
18	Bereavement visitors	Dawn Duffin, Jayne and Ian Durnett Bob and Nancy Emery Allison and Steve Fairweather	Tyndale Road Verde Close Wesley Close
25	Home groups	Ken Fox, Michelle Francis Steve and Sarah Fry Julie, Shaun Josh & Hollie Fudge	Wesley Hill Whitfield Close Willis Road

SUNDAYS: 8am BCP **Holy Communion** (on the Ist & 3rd Sunday).
10am **Community Worship Service** weekly.

Prayer Ministry is offered after the 10am Service on the Ist and 3rd Sundays *or at any other time by request, so do please ask as necessary.*

WEDNESDAYS: 10am **Service of Holy Communion** weekly.

JANUARY DIARY

03 Saturday	9.30am	**Little Church** *in Church (by invitation: see Lisa)*
06 Tuesday	1.30pm	**Knit & Natter** *in the Church Room* (then weekly)
07 Wednesday	11am 2pm 7.15pm	**Coffee/Chat/Company** *at the Turnpike Pub* Ministry Team Meeting *in the Church Room* **BRING YOUR BIBLE** *in the Church Room*
08 Thursday	10am 1.30pm	**See & Know** *in the Church Hall* (then weekly) **Men's Group** *in the Church Room*
09 Friday	1.30pm 7pm	**Pensioner's Group** *in the Church Hall* **Outburst** Youth Club *in the Church Hall*
12 Monday	10.15am	**Retreat Memory Café** *in the Church Hall* for Dementia sufferers and their carers
13 Tuesday	9~11.30am 7.30pm	**WELCOME SPACE** *in the Church Room* **PCC meeting** *in the Church Room*
14 Wednesday	2pm 7.15pm	**BIBLE CHAT** *in the Church Room* **BRING YOUR BIBLE** *in the Church Room*
15 Thursday	1pm	**Ladies Group** Wine & Cheese *in the Church Hall*
16 Friday	6.30pm	**FRIDAY NIGHT LIVE** RESUMES *in Church*
21 Wednesday	7.15pm	**BRING YOUR BIBLE** *in the Church Room*
22 Thursday	1.30pm	**Men's Group** *in the Church Room*
23 Friday	1.30pm	**Pensioner's Group** *in the Church Hall*
26 Monday	10.15am	**Retreat Memory Café** *in the Church Hall* for Dementia sufferers and their carers
27 Tuesday	9~11.30am	**WELCOME SPACE** *in the Church Room*
28 Wednesday	2pm 7.15pm	**BIBLE CHAT** *in the Church sofa corner* **BRING YOUR BIBLE** *in the Church Room*
29 Thursday	2pm 7pm	**Ladies Group** *in the Church Hall* Drama Group **PANTOMIME** begins **Sinbad the Sailor** *See advert on page 5*

FEBRUARY DIARY

03 Tuesday	1.30pm	**Knit & Natter** *in the Church Room* (then weekly)
04 Wednesday	11am 7.15pm	**Coffee/Chat/Company** *at the Turnpike Pub* **BRING YOUR BIBLE** *in the Church Room*
05 Thursday	10am 1.30pm	**See & Know** *in the Church Hall* (then weekly) **Men's Group** *in the Church Room*
06 Friday	1.30pm 7pm	**Pensioner's Group** *in the Church Hall* **Outburst** Youth Club *in the Church Hall*
09 Monday	10.15am	**Retreat Memory Café** *in the Church Hall* for Dementia sufferers and their carers

FROM THE REGISTERS

SINCE NOVEMBER

Baptisms:

• NOVEMBER 30: **Daisy Ivy Ruth Ball**

Please hold Daisy's parents, Hayley and George; her Godparents, Christopher, Leo. Jon, Emma, Nicola and Corrianne; and all the family and their friends in your prayers.

Funerals:

• DECEMBER 15: **Maria Williams** (100)

The Celebration of Maria's life was held at Langstone Vale Crematorium.

Please hold her children; Susan, Alan, David and Jane; their families and all their friends in your prayers.

• DECEMBER 17: **Heather Parslow** (93)

The celebration of Heather's life was held at Westerleigh Crematorium.

Please hold Heather's children Tina and Betty, their families, the wider family and Heather's friends in your prayers.

DIAL-A-SERMON

Listen to this week's Sermon on your phone:

0117 456 2090

(Cost is the same as a local call)

OR

CLICK-A-SERMON

Visit our website and use the audio link to listen on-line

http://www.saintstephensoundwell.org

SAINT STEPHENS SOUNDWELL

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• Revd **Sandy Cooper**
Associate Minister, 1 Deerhurst
Soundwell, Bristol BS15 1XH
Telephone 0117 967 2621

• **Elaine Brewster**
Community Chaplain
Telephone 07 902 095915

• **Gill Mayo**
Church Warden
Telephone 0117 956 9796

• **Lin Cooper** *Director of Music*
Telephone 0117 967 2621

• **Lorraine Sanderson** *Treasurer*
Telephone 0117 940 1829

• **Jenny Bishop**
Pastoral Co-ordinator
Telephone 0117 9575729