



A Service of Lament and Reflection

11 July 2026
St Bartholomew's Church, Winchester

In planning this service, we have been deeply conscious of the profound, painful and complex experiences that were lived, felt and are still carried by the women, children and families affected by mother and baby homes and forced adoptions. These stories deserve the utmost care, dignity and acknowledgement and we pay tribute to all those who have shared their experiences with us and those who have bravely come here today.

We are aware that not all the words in this service will resonate with everyone but our hope and prayer is that they give voice to some of the pain and sorrow of those impacted, to the lament of the church, and to the comfort and peace of God who sees and heals our deepest wounds.

Chaplains are present and can be identified by their lanyards. They are on hand if you need space, prayer, a glass of water, or just a listening ear at any point during or after the service. If you would value a longer conversation about your experience, please contact our pastoral team at mandb@winchesterdiocese.org. Please also feel free to leave the service at any point to find a quiet space.

VOTIVE CANDLE LIT

Our hope is in the name of the Lord, who binds up the broken-hearted
and gives a voice to the voiceless.

THE WELCOME

If we find ourselves full of sorrow and anguish

In this moment we ask for solace.

If we find ourselves in pain and suffering

In this moment we ask for healing.

If we find ourselves lost or uncertain

In this moment we ask for comfort.

We come together to receive love in the midst of emptiness
and find peace in the depths of loss.

POEM READING

'Courage', by Sophie House

Courage isn't having the strength to go on,

It is going on when you don't have strength.

Courage doesn't always roar,

It is sometimes the little voice that says

I'll try again tomorrow.

Courage is about learning to function,

Despite the overwhelming fear.

Courage doesn't happen when you have all the answers,

It occurs when you are ready to face the questions.

Courage is losing sight of the shore,

Even when you can't see the new horizon.

Courage isn't about putting on a brave face,

It is taking that brave face off and letting the tears fall.

Courage can be found in the most unlikely places,

Wherever that may be,

Always remember that you are braver than you seem,

Smarter than you believe

And more loved than you know.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE

'Ave Maria' by Franz Schubert, sung by Catherine Gardiner

PERSONAL STORIES SHARED BY PENNY AND SCILLA

SENTENCES OF LAMENT

Lord God, our maker and our redeemer, hear us as we cry out to you in sorrow.

Lord have mercy

Christ have mercy

For the women whose voices have been muted, for those who have been stigmatized and undermined, silenced and harmed, ignored and disempowered.

Lord have mercy

Christ have mercy

For the children who were lost and denied knowledge, confused and unidentified, misunderstood and left wondering.

Lord have mercy

Christ have mercy

For our society and our church whenever it chooses reputation over love, shame over compassion, secrets over truth.

Lord have mercy

Christ have mercy

Bind up the wounds of those who have been hurt and forgive those who have caused harm, O Lord, and in your mercy make us whole.

Amen

SCRIPTURE READING

Psalm 139

¹You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.

²You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.

³You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.

⁴Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.

- ⁵ You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.
- ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.
- ⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
- ⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
- ⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
- ¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
- ¹¹ If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,”
- ¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.
- ¹³ For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.
- ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
- ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
- ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.
- ¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, God!
How vast is the sum of them!
- ¹⁸ Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand—
when I awake, I am still with you.

- ¹⁹ If only you, God, would slay the wicked!
Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!
- ²⁰ They speak of you with evil intent;
your adversaries misuse your name.
- ²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord,
and abhor those who are in rebellion against you?
- ²² I have nothing but hatred for them;
I count them my enemies.
- ²³ Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
- ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

ADDRESS

The Rt Revd Kelly Betteridge, Bishop of Basingstoke

LIGHTING CANDLES OF REMEMBRANCE

Four candles are lit...

The first candle we light represents our sorrow and our loss.

The second candle we light represents the mothers and babies separated without consent.

The third candle we light represents the women and children who died, including those who rest in unmarked graves in the city cemetery.

The fourth candle we light represents our courage and our perseverance as we face the future together.

THE UNVEILING OF THE PLAQUE

During the hymn that follows, all those present are invited to bring a rose forward, place it in the vase on the altar and receive a lit candle in return.

HYMN

'The Lord's My Shepherd', sung by Catherine Gardiner

The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want;
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green; He leadeth me
The quiet waters by.

My soul He doth restore again,
And me to walk doth make
Within the paths of righteousness,
E'en for His own name's sake.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,
Yet will I fear no ill;
For Thou art with me, and Thy rod
And staff me comfort still.

My table Thou hast furnished
In presence of my foes;
My head Thou dost with oil anoint,
And my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life
Shall surely follow me,
And in God's house forevermore
My dwelling-place shall be.

POEM READING

'The Cord' by Amy Merrick

We are connected, my child and I,
By an invisible cord not seen by the eye.
It's not like the cord that connects us 'til birth
This cord can't been seen by any on Earth.
This cord does its work right from the start.
It binds us together attached to my heart.
I know that it's there though no one can see
The invisible cord from my child to me.
The strength of this cord is hard to describe.
It can't be destroyed, it can't be denied.

It's stronger than any cord man could create
It withstands the test, can hold any weight.
And though you are gone, though you're not here with me,
The cord is still there but no one can see.
It pulls at my heart, I am bruised, I am sore,
But this cord is my lifeline as never before.
I am thankful that we are connected this way
A child from a mother nothing can take away.

PRAYERS

The Lord is close to the broken-hearted; those whose spirit is crushed
God will save.

Lord God, hear our prayer for all in pain and vulnerability, those whose
lives are still overshadowed by memories and misplaced shame: reassure
them of your presence and power to heal and strengthen by your
unconditional love.

Renew your Church in the love of truth and in passion for justice. Forgive
us and heal us from all hypocrisy and deceit, and teach us to serve with
humility those whose lives are broken, to rejoice in your love with integrity.
Help us to cherish and protect all in our community who are vulnerable.

Give us the courage to learn from the past, and through your Spirit give
us the hope to look forward to life with you and through you,
proclaiming your love in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.**

CLOSING SENTENCES

May the love of God gently wipe every tear from our eyes

And wrap us in his care.

May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ comfort us and console us

So we may know his presence.

May the Holy Spirit surround us to protect us

And give us strength each day.

THE BLESSING

May God be a bright flame before you,
a guiding star to lighten the darkness.

My God prepare the way for you
and when it is hard to see,
lead you with outstretched arm.

May God shield you and surround you,
and walk with you into the light of each new day.

And may the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you
this night and for evermore.

Amen.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE WINCHESTER DIOCESAN MATERNITY HOME

Penny's Story

Imagine this: You are in an office in front of a desk, behind which sits a Moral Welfare Officer. It is 1965 and you are a teenager of fifteen. Your baby was born in a strict Christian unmarried mothers' home and you remain there with her for six weeks after the birth, supposedly giving you time to make the choice. It is an inevitability, but not a choice.

The moment you gave her up is tattooed forever in memory; your own mother at your side, your baby in the carrycot on the floor, half the distance between you and the desk. The Moral Welfare lady is brusque. Her lips are moving, but you don't take in what she is saying. You know in another room behind a closed door waits a childless married couple you will never meet. Their faces are the next thing your baby will see and she will never remember yours. You scribble your name on piece of paper saying you promise you will never try to contact your baby. You leave the room, the baby ... and that's it. You may have gone pale with shock. You might cry. You may have run out of the building. And your kindly mother might say 'You have the rest of your life to live.' But the rest of your life means you carry a shameful secret, believing you had committed a guilty act and oh! - how you wish things had been different. The ache stays deep in your body, nestled somewhere between your heart and your head. And you 'll always wonder what happened to that baby girl.

It was not unusual then that unmarried mothers were hidden away in Mother and Baby homes to bear 'illegitimate' children in secret. Society declared this shameful, regardless of the circumstances and some homes, often run by the Church, had the regimes of a Victorian Workhouses both in attitude and the hard physical work expected of you. The staff were often both unsympathetic and judgemental, it seems this place is a punishment for our foolish behaviour. The other partner in this 'crime' - the fathers - were never mentioned and suffered no consequences for their part. Abortion was illegal, contraceptive advice was available only to married women.

In St Barts - 1 North Walls - where I was, it was our own fault we were there, and if we loved our babies at all we could atone for our sins by

giving them up for a better life than we could ever offer. At that particular time the home was for under 16's, the youngest when I was there was 12. She miscarried. Most of the babies were delivered at the Home. I was in labour for 48 hours and told that I had a 'lazy womb' before I was eventually rushed in an ambulance to hospital where I was given a general anaesthetic and the baby delivered by forceps. She weighed in at over 9 pounds but was healthy and beautiful.

Over time, attitudes change. Technology changes. Eventually I found some places to leave a bread-crumble trail for that baby girl should she ever want to seek out her birth mother. I left enough detail for us to recognize each other, but did so with a sense of dread, fearful of the possible pain I could bring to her and of the blame onto myself. She may not know she was adopted. She might have had an unhappy childhood. She may even be dead.

This much of the story is true but here is the fantasy:

In my imagination, an unexpected email pings into my inbox and a firmly shut door swings wide open. I feel sick. How can I explain? Who has that baby become? Who have I become? What questions might she ask for which I don't have answers. Will she judge me? When the call comes, the voice at the other end of the phone doesn't sound like anyone I know. I don't know why I thought it would. It's the voice of a grown woman. I answer her questions about how she came to be adopted. She asks me about my life and she tells me about hers: how her parents adopted her brother; their schools, their camping holidays and family life. She'll send photos and asks me to send her one. She wonders about her birth father and how to answer those question on those medical forms that ask things like: 'Is there a family history of...?' She doesn't mention meeting with me, but somehow I don't mind.

When the photos arrive, there is a letter. It says:

'It was good to connect with you after all this time. You and I both have memories: yours is of me as a young baby and how your heart was broken when you gave me up. But my life has been full of happy memories of growing up with my parents and my brother. I have a partner now, and a job, and children of my own. I can't begin to imagine what it must feel like to lose one. But that baby then isn't who I am now. I grew up well, I have a happy life. Think of this, and find it in your heart to be glad, not sad.'

I cry. And I am glad.

I like to read - and sometimes write - stories with happy endings, because I know real life isn't always written that way.

G's Story

Three years ago, my father died. My mother, aged 84 years was struggling in her bereavement and I urged her to go to bereavement therapy. However, his death had triggered something much deeper, a loss she had endured and told no-one about when she was 14 years old, a painful secret she had kept for 70 years. Her baby 'S' was born and she was taken to Winchester Mother and Baby Home and stayed there for 6 months before forms were signed and she was handed over to her forever family. My mother finally told me and my siblings, but within days of finding out about 'S' we found she had died 3 years before. My mother then suffered another type of loss.

Given this family history, I couldn't quite believe the career I had chosen. For the past 30 years I have worked as a midwife focusing on caring for women who are vulnerable and families who are complex and in need of a co-ordinated approach to their care. On average, 3000 babies are removed from their families at birth in the UK. Before the 1970s women were separated from their babies for being too young or unmarried. Thankfully this practice has changed, and babies are only removed in the most risk associated situations when families are not safe to have a baby within them.

Throughout my time working with families, I wanted to offer something to the mothers to recognise their time with their babies in those first moments, when they are held, loved, wanted but due to circumstances beyond their control they are not able to keep. Whilst the courts and children's social care make the difficult decisions, women and babies are on the postnatal wards awaiting the outcome. During this time, I offer to come to the ward and take photos showing those first moments of being held.

All these years I had been caring for families without ever knowing just how close these situations and family complexities are to me. I had already had the idea as an amateur photographer and midwife to run this project, but knowing about my lost sibling has given me a newfound passion to make this happen for all mothers around the UK and not just at the hospital where I am linked to.

The logo represents that first cuddle, embrace, breathing in your baby. Her necklace bears the letter S. This is for the lost siblings and, of course, for baby 'S'.



Tina's Story

I have a lot of questions about my adoption and what happened to my birth mum. She was really quite damaged by the adoption process and went through a lot of that alone with people she didn't know. And it has made me question what happened and how I came to be there in the home and how sending somebody out on an errand and taking their baby away from them is kind.

Later in life I actually met and developed a relationship with my birth mother, but she was very messed up. When she got pregnant at 15 I believe my great-grandmother said you can't have an illegitimate child in the house, that it would ruin her marriage chances. There had been a long ride on a train and she had to leave her family behind and there was nobody there with her. In the baby home she'd been made to do chores like clean the steps and stairs and polishing things – she was very young and no emotional care was taken of her. The home was very regimented - they had times to do things and times to be in bed and times for feeding a baby and times for changing a baby. But there wasn't time for her to sit and think about it then.

I think as she grew older, she realised what she'd missed and that sort of formed who she was. She was quite hard at times and she didn't really want to communicate any more about her story, other than that was she felt that she was pressured into that home, she felt she was pressured into the decision to have me adopted. She told me that when my adoptive parents arrived to take me that she'd been sent out on an errand to a local shop and when she came back I'd just gone and that was it, which was very painful and shocking.

I got on with my adoptive father really well, I felt he really cherished me. But sadly, when I was five years old, my dad passed away very suddenly and life changed. We moved from the south to the north and I didn't fit in anywhere and I felt pretty much isolated. My mum's life also changed dramatically - she wasn't the warmest of people anyway but she became very harsh, she'd put me in the wendy house on my own with a potty and bring me food occasionally. Things were very difficult in my teenage years and I felt my mum didn't really understand me as a person.

I remember I went through a particularly hard phase when I was about 14 or 15, when I was really worried for my birth mother. I worried that how was she without me? Did she think about me on my birthday? What her life was like? And I wondered if she was as unhappy as I was at one point. And I just wanted to ask them to send me back.

What I'd like to get across to people is that when you're an adopted person, you don't feel you fit in certain places. You don't feel you fit in your adoptive family, and you don't feel you fit in your natural family because you haven't had that upbringing. And for me, I've got a foot in each camp. Some people struggle to voice that but actually I want to say that it's fine to voice that, and it's good to voice that. Because that helps you know who you are.

As an adoptee, large parts of my life have not been very happy. I've made choices that aren't the right choices and have caused me a lot of hurt as to who I am now. I've not been able to form really good relationships with family. I've often felt isolated and that I've not fitted in anything. I felt that I'm not clever at things and I've also felt that I'm not able to do things. But I have learned over the last few years that actually I can do some of the things I thought I couldn't do.

Scilla's Story

To slowly piece together the fragments of my mother's trauma - and to recognise the echoes of it in my own life - has been both poignant and precious. I now realise that my identity is deeply connected to the collective values and resilience of my origins: curiosity guides me; possibility motivates me; awareness of what is current keeps me alive to change, and imagination gives meaning to the future I hope to help create.

My mother, ostracised by her own family, was not permitted to see them, nor were they allowed to meet me. Her only place of recourse - some might argue sanctuary - was in The Home for Repentant Women in Winchester. I find myself wondering how long mothers were kept in residence after those stark births. I was told that following my premature arrival, I was placed overnight in a wooden or cardboard box on a windowsill - my survival dependent on the grace of the night. By morning, life resumed. I had survived. Almost mundane details appear in memory: references to nursing bras and undergarments - quiet reminders that daily life had to continue even under such harsh circumstances. Life did not pause for grief or shame.

I know that adoption was considered a certainty for me; my name, Katharine, had already been chosen. I was put into foster placement with a family near Yealmpton in Devon. But then, for reasons unknown, I was eventually returned to live with my birth mother. On the surface this

appeared a positive outcome; in reality, it led to abject poverty - largely invisible and entirely under the radar. Illegitimacy carried automatic exclusion and non-entitlement to both social care and education. As a young person, I was described by a sixth form lecturer as “evil” simply for being born illegitimate - a seed of shame planted early.

I now understand that this judgement was rooted in the doctrine of the Church of England at that moment in history: a post-war moral welfare policy shaped by Church teaching, social shame, limited medical resources and rigid ideas of female morality. Within that framework, children born outside marriage were believed to embody disgrace.

So much of my story had to remain hidden for decades. In today’s world, such secrecy feels almost unthinkable. But in those days, you were born already burdened with failure - born to fail. How curious, then, that I have ended up - almost by accident - nurturing others across communities, cultures and countries, as an award-winning independent dance artist, choreographer, performance coach, mentor, visiting professor, author, and champion of innovation, health and well-being. What once seemed a sequence of unrelated encounters now feels like a continuous thread running through my life... and long before I understood why certain places become portals. Now, in June 2026, I recognise that Winchester is - and always has been - a place that emerges at moments of transition:

Will the Memorial Service be the resolution I seek, a doorway, a threshold through which I finally ... literally... walk free?

