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Sharing Faith in Jesus Christ

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The Link is the magazine of Oakham Team Ministry, part of the Church of England in Rutland. We are:

St Mary Ashwell  
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St Peter Brooke  
St Edmund Egleton  
St Andrew Hambleton  
St Peter and St Paul  
Langham  
St Peter and St Paul  
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All Saints Oakham  
Holy Trinity Teigh  
St Andrew Whissendine

You can find out more about us on our website:

[www.oakhamteam.org.uk](http://www.oakhamteam.org.uk)

The Link is published three times a year, at Christmas, Easter and the Summer, and is distributed to members of all the churches in the Oakham Team Ministry, and to local hotels, libraries and other outlets.

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Front cover photograph,  
*Langham Church in Spring*,  
by Kevin Slingsby

Advertising rates for  
one / three issues:  
Full page £85 / £220  
Back page £105 / £270  
Half page £44 / £114  
Quarter page £24 / £65  
Eighth page £12 / £32

Design  
**Kevin Slingsby**

Printed by Instantprint, Unit A  
Brookfields Park, Manvers  
Way, Manvers, Rotherham,  
S63 5DR

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## Sharing Faith in Jesus Christ

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# Belonging to Each Other

## Revd Stephen Griffiths, Team Rector

The winter months make us appreciate our homes. It's not just to do with the shelter and security they offer in the cold weather and long dark nights. The winter months provide opportunities for us to spend time with family and friends. We linger around the kitchen table over hearty meals. We gather together our loved ones for Christmas and New Year celebrations. We light the fire and talk.

Our homes are more than mere bricks and mortar. They are the setting for much of the drama of life. They reflect our personality and lifestyle. They are the consistent backdrop to the changes we face. Although we live in an era of great mobility, and although getting on the property ladder can be very hard, people of every generation have a desire for a home of some kind. The building proposals for our (and every) county demonstrate that there is still a need for homes. We haven't yet outgrown our human need to belong somewhere.

What gets missed in a lot of our talk about houses and homes is the need for a 'household'. DIY and furniture shops encourage us to 'make our house a home'. But it's still possible to have a warm and comfortable home and yet be lonely or disconnected.

The idea of the household is not just about having a family to share our

house with. It's the idea that the house is the point of connection for all kinds of relationships. Before the rise in home ownership the household might include lodgers, staff, multiple generations of family, seasonal workers, itinerant traders, and two or more families under one roof.

Although we tend to live fairly private lives, it's still possible to recover the idea of a household. Our homes can be places of welcome and hospitality for family, friends and strangers, and places of comfort and peace for those in need. They can be the setting for building friendship amongst our neighbours.

There is a strong sense throughout the bible that God is gathering together one ever-expanding household. The emphasis in the New Testament is not on the church building as the house of God, but on people as the household of God. Through Christian love in action, God



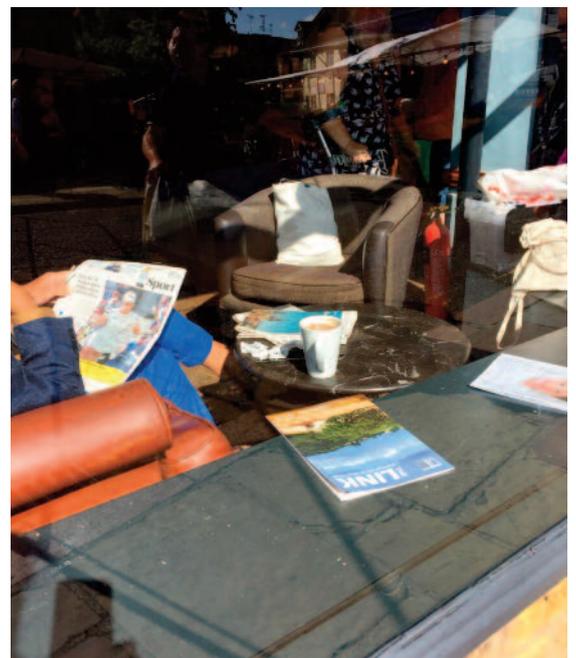
extends the offer of companionship, shelter, peace, comfort, forgiveness, and space to grow. God's household is a complex network of relationships reaching into every area of life. It requires us to take the risk of belonging to each other.

Winter brings many challenges to those who have neither a house nor a household. Extending the boundaries of our spiritual household can go some way in caring for those still searching for security and welcome. In the depth of winter we remember a family who sought shelter for their new-born son. He now invites us to come into his household.

Yours in the service of Jesus Christ,

## Spot The Link - prize draw!

Beryl Kirtland, roving reporter and distributor of The Link, has been out and about and spotted us in a couple of places in the benefice – do you know where these are? A prize for anyone who can identify both – send your entries to [editor@link.otm.org.uk](mailto:editor@link.otm.org.uk) and we will draw the winner out of a hat!



# From the Editor

**Ann Blackett**

Where are we most at home? When the editorial team discussed this issue of the Link, we settled on working on a 'theme' of belonging, home, shelter. I think I envisaged a mix of articles: about home life, belonging to a parish, the things which make us a community and how we welcome new people in. But the flip side – homelessness, leaving home, not-just-bricks-and-mortar – has crept in somehow. That's not to say that this issue is full of doom and gloom – quite the reverse, in fact, as our contributors have reflected on what it means to be 'at home' in this world, in a community, in a family, and what can be done to support this.

It's a fragile thing, though, home. Over the past three years I've lived in three houses: leaving a house I owned, to two rentals, back to ownership of a sort. I've not seriously been at danger of becoming homeless, but I've been quite close to not having a roof I could call mine, and my brush with the rental sector has made me understand what it's like to have to find deposits and references, pack up stuff and move, clean the place from top to bottom so that you'll get your deposit back when you move out – and keep the momentum up even when you feel as though all you want to do is shut the door on the world and rest. See how even our dreams are tied up with our need for a home, privacy, peace, shelter?

I've been doing most of the packing and admin solo, but I've been lucky enough to have friends and family who've been in a position to help when called on. What it must be like when you're ill, or responsible for a family, or without regular income, or knocked completely off balance by

things happening your life, I can't begin to imagine. They say many people are just two paydays away from homelessness; I can well believe it.

But in a society where money talks louder than almost anything else, what can be done? We could put the money to work, building houses and flats for rent to give families and individuals the security and stability of a roof, privacy, and an address. My own family arrived from the north-east in 1973 – economic migrants! – hopelessly unable to buy a house in Oakham but able to rent at first private accommodation, then council housing, which was still being built – we lived in West Road, Grampian Way, South Street and The Lodge. It meant we could put down roots and become part of the community – my Dad became a postman, my mother worked in catering, I joined the final year at Rutland High School and later the Venture Scouts. Reliable housing gives shelter, security, growth, community, responsibility and a stake in where you live.

On the other hand, as Christians we follow a man who was born in a stable, whose family had to leave the country to escape danger, who left home at 30 to wander from place to place, disrupting the the lives of people left, right and centre, who was buried in a borrowed grave. 'Leave everything,' Jesus says, 'and follow me'. Through the centuries people have followed him in many different ways, as itinerant preachers, meditating solitary in desert huts, living in enclosed communities, gathering in house churches and cathedrals, travelling on pilgrimage in search of meaning. It's Jesus who holds everything together, and it's his love, reflected in our love for families, friends, companions both humans and animal, which calls us to search for home. But our ultimate home is in him: when St Augustine wrote at the beginning of his Confessions, 'God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you' it was as true then as it is now.



# News



## Festival of Faith

Churches Together in Oakham's Festival of Faith, *A New Day Dawns*, has now been running for a while and has included some very varied events, both spiritual and popular. In October, Christians from many churches came to St Joseph's over four evenings for a Mission led by Dominican Friar Fr John Farrell OP, and to the Methodist Church for a concert by Marilyn Baker. The pictures show Christian comedian John Archer on stage at the Catmose Club in November (*right*), and the crowds at the Songs of Praise in Cutts Close in September (*above*). There was a very successful – and highly visible – Nativity Trail at Oakham Late-Night Shopping when lots of families visited the bases around the town and some came into the All Saints for the first time ever. Future events include an evening of swing music with Revd Ron Iveson, the Singing Vicar, and a Gospel Choir in concert. For details pick up a leaflet in any church or see the Oakham Team Ministry website. All are welcome to all events!



## New Ministry

Rachel Thompson was licensed as Associate Minister in Oakham a few weeks ago (*pictured bottom left with the Bishop, Team Rector and Rural Dean*). If her face looks familiar it is because she has already been living here for several years and also because she works at the Air Ambulance shop in Cold Overton Road. Rachel will be serving as a Minister in Secular Employment, mostly with the people she meets at work.

After a long search, there is now a Team Vicar for Braunston, Brooke, Egleton and Hamilton. Revd Chris Rattenbury was licensed by Bishop Donald a special service in All Saints Oakham in November. Chris (*below*) has served for most of his ministry in Southwell and Nottingham and he and his wife Heather come to us via short periods in South Africa and North Yorkshire. We welcome them to Rutland!





## Confirmations

It was good to see ten people – two adults and eight young people – coming to be confirmed by Bishop John at Oakham in a crowded service at All Saints Oakham late last year (*left*). Team Choir Laudamus sang and Bethany Davis sang a solo verse of 'In Christ alone'. Bishop John spoke about the inspiration given in today's world by young people like Malala Yousafzai and Greta Thunberg. The atmosphere was very welcoming and special as the group took this new step in their Christian lives.

A group of Rutland friends travelled to St Peter and St Paul in Syston to celebrate the confirmation of Simeon and Eleanor Francis-Dehqani by Bishop Guli. Lee, our former Rector, is now Team Rector of the Fosse Team, to the north of Leicester, and Syston is one of his churches.

## Prayer Breakfast

There was a good turnout from many Rutland churches at the annual Prayer Breakfast in the Victoria Hall in Oakham (*right*). This is a regular event to mark the beginning of the Week of Christian Unity every January. The speaker this year was no stranger - Baroness Berridge (*below*), who was born and brought up in Oakham, and went to school at the Vale of Catmose College and the Rutland College before going on to study Law at Cambridge.

She spoke about unity, beginning with a reading from John 17, vv20-23, 'that all of them may be one', and compared the way that starlings fly, all together in their wonderful murmurations, with our lives in church which might be more like dodgem cars. However the collisions are a way to grow together in our community as we work and grow together more deeply. It was an inspiring talk, which was much appreciated by the audience, and many people took the chance to catch up with her afterwards.



## Introducing Stephen Hatch

Stephen works for the international mission agency Church Mission Society and is supported by All Saints Oakham. He spoke to the congregation on Sunday 19th January and visited Oakham Church of England Primary School.

Stephen (*below*) works at St. John's Seminary, Tanzania, which provides education from nursery age to adult bible college students. Stephen's particular role is to help young children reach the standard in English and maths to enable them to progress to secondary school. Currently 80% of children in Tanzania attend primary school and 25% attend secondary school.

This creates a huge gulf in learning and life choices within Tanzanian society. Mathematics has the lowest pass rate of all subjects in Tanzania at only 15% of those taking the exams. Stephen works alongside other teachers at St John's to improve this across the whole school, and makes sure the school has the appropriate equipment in the school laboratories for use in science lessons and exams. Alongside his teaching role, he work with the school chaplain, helping to lead the church services at the Seminary across all ages and managing the team of pupil volunteers who preach and help out.



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# What is it like to have no home?

## Revd Iain Osborne

Ron<sup>1</sup> was a married family man who never expected that he would become homeless. But his life changed after a chain of events:

*'I had a loan issue, marriage break up, lost my job, health issues, over-priced private rental properties which I couldn't maintain, sofa surfing with friends. The whole thing just imploded really and that made my life more difficult.'*

He spent two years living in a garden shed. When asked what the biggest issues are when you are homeless, Ron has little doubt: 'Lack of access to medical help and other facilities. It's been a real eye-opener to me to what it means to be homeless and rough sleeping. I started to feel more and more under-valued as a person. At one time I was quite cushioned, being married with family you know but I'm a good example that it could happen to anyone.'

As Ron reports, the problem is not mainly about a lack of comfort or heat. Ron's biggest difficulty was in accessing help. Homeless people have no transport to get to appointments. No address to put on forms, and nowhere to receive mail. Nowhere to charge a mobile phone or keep their stuff.

### Shrinking Horizons

A person sleeping rough has good evidence that no-one really cares whether he lives or dies. His health will suffer, both physical and mental. Rough sleepers are regularly robbed or attacked. After a while, the horizon shrinks to the short-term; life becomes a daily struggle to survive; one loses the habits of planning and budgeting.

People become homeless for many reasons. Some have a family history of abuse, or problems with mental health or addiction. However, others are like Ron, and have simply been unlucky. The charity Shelter<sup>2</sup> reports that in England nearly two-thirds of privately renting households have no savings at all. That might shock you, but it is perhaps unsurprising, given that on average rent eats up 41% of a private renting household's monthly income. As a result, more than half a

million (550,000) renting families with children survive from payday to payday, and face being unable to find their rent from the very moment they lose their job. A staggering 60% of working families with children who rent privately would face default and possible eviction after a month of unemployment.

Children bear the brunt. One in 37 lone-parent families live in temporary accommodation in England, and a child in temporary accommodation will miss an average of 55 school days a year. A child living in bad housing is more likely to develop respiratory problems like asthma.

### Families in Crisis

The lack of affordable housing in the UK is nothing short of a crisis. Decades of Government policy have eroded the stock of public-sector social housing, and hindered its replacement. Levels of public housebuilding have plummeted dramatically, which has led to a sharp increase in families stuck in expensive, poor quality, insecure privately rented homes. Right now, 1.2 million people are on the waiting list for social housing, yet just 5,000 new social homes were built last year. As a result, 90,000 households are stuck in unsuitable temporary accommodation, such as bed and breakfast or homeless hostels – a rise of 38% in the last five years. At the same time around 4,750 people sleep on England's streets on a typical night (up 165% since 2010<sup>3</sup>).

### How can we respond to this crisis?

We can work at the local scale. Oakham's churches are working to buy and run a house so as to help

people whose lives have been blighted by homelessness. We call this Project Sukkot, after the Jewish festival when God's people were invited to live in shacks for a week, as a reminder that they had themselves been homeless. The project will run in partnership with a Peterborough charity called *Hope into Action*. We hope to house two or three people on a medium-term basis (one to two years), during which we will provide them with love and support as they re-establish the habits and life-structures needed to sustain an independent tenancy.

### Policy Changes

However, we need to think bigger. The roots of homelessness lie in public policy. We can all support charities like Shelter that campaign for changes in policy: to build more affordable houses; to improve the rights of renters; and to end discrimination (six in ten landlords say they prefer not to rent to people on benefits).

And whenever you are given the opportunity to vote, think about housing. Think about Ron, and the rough sleepers, and the children in bed and breakfast rooms. Ask the candidates what they plan to do about it.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Ron is a real person, but this is not his real name.

<sup>2</sup>Statistics in this article are from Shelter unless otherwise attributed, <https://england.shelter.org.uk/>.

<sup>3</sup>Rough Sleeping Statistics release, 25 February 2019, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.



# Vyv's Camino Pilgrimage with Nordic Walkers

## Vyv Wainwright

This is the journal which I kept recently whilst on a pilgrimage along part of the Camino towards Santiago de Compostela last May. It was an interesting and challenging journey and I hope what you read from here gives you some of the flavour of this unique experience.

### Day 1 Hanging Around

It is not often that you set off at 1.30 in the morning to go and see a Danish Invader or Viking. But after many months of talking about it, practising, equipping and getting packed, we have reached the point of my fellow Nordic Walkers gathering at the Danish Invader pub in Stamford to set out on our Camino pilgrimage.

We gather in the thick black darkness, peering around and (as The Stranglers sang), just 'hanging

around'. After we had done that, we decided to investigate. Where is the minibus? How are we to get to Gatwick? We have a flight to catch!

Our supplications were duly answered and very nice man with a very nice van arrived and behold we were on our way. We got to Gatwick, checked in and made the decision to split up and go to different restaurants and cafes, and so soon discovered that we knew the folk on the table opposite, adjacent and indeed behind us.

Our gate number popped up and we

were off. Once on the plane, we have to hang around even more, for 15 minutes to be exact, then we taxi down the runway and whoosh, we are off to Bilboa. Did we put the cat out though? It felt that no sooner had the 'fasten your seatbelt' sign switched off that it must have been faulty because it came back on again. However, a quick look out of the window gave us a view of rolling Spanish countryside and pantile roofs not to forget that famous classic Spanish restaurant chain McD's!

'This way please,' was what the very

smartly dressed driver said as we were ushered towards an executive mini coach. And so, we sped along through Spain and then just drove into France as you do. Two and a half hours later and we arrive in the beautiful town of St Jean de Pied, where we alight to a delightful small whitewashed hotel with balconies to enjoy a very comfortable evening and night.

After a good night's sleep in a shuttered windowed bedroom with glorious ensuite, we breakfast, put on the gear and unleash the Nordic poles, lace up the boots, check the shades, say a prayer and we are off.

## Day 2

### **Come unto me all that are heavily laden**

We go off at a nice sensible pace, admiring the houses as we go. I spot one for sale and my eye is drawn to a lovely detached house in need of modernisation and love. It could so easily represent how many of us feel these days: in need of a bit of attention. I even fancied surveying it but onwards we must go.

At first it's rather like Derbyshire as we gently amble along the roads. The sound of panting stops us in our tracks though, as two dear gentlemen in their mid-seventies wearing bandanas puff and pant their way past us on their bikes. But we share our Bon Caminos and plod on. Soon it is time to go off-piste and we head up a steep gravelled path, almost like a riverbed. Here I have any interesting encounter with a splendidly mad but heavily laden gent. The conversation is fabulous and mad. Living in the USA this gent has strong opinions but let's keep those private.

After much hard walking we reach our first coffee stop, and here we are level with the eagles as they soar on high. Expressos all done, off we go once more and next I encounter an Irish healer, a nice guy who tells me an interesting tale of helping a fellow walker whose glasses and eyes had frozen up and therefore needed leading back down a mountain to thaw both his glasses and eyes. Behold he sees!

The next climb is incredibly hard and it is the first time I would like an escalator please. But God is good and the Irish healer's wife rewards us with a green jelly baby. What goes up must come down, and yes, it is as hard as going up, but we descend with caution to Roncesvalles, and a big blessing of a beer and a monastery run exceedingly efficiently by Benedictines. After a refreshing shower it we explore and find ourselves accidentally joining a mass. Always be careful, children, when going into great big churches, for you never know what you might encounter.



After the mass comes an international blessing for the pilgrims in Korean, French, Spanish, German and English including Australian! What a great way to finish the day.

## Day 3

### **Open your eyes that you may see**

My thighs are on fire and ache but the only way to heal them is to get moving and so after some delicate stretching, we are off walking through the woods. It is cool and shady and it makes me think of God strolling around the Garden of Eden in the dappled shade of the evening. All is good. Having got into a rhythm you can simply plod along unseeing, but open your eyes! Take time to look around and listen, see the beautiful flowers, golden broom bushes and wild fennel, and listen to the song of the birds. I suddenly notice an unexpected cross in a stream bed as we hop over. Why I did not photograph this I do not know but maybe it is meant to be a memory for me. As I step from stone to stone, I glance down into the

stream bed, I see how the cross has been formed in the gravel. A sign? Certainly it makes me think of the way of the cross, and how life can feel like you are on the way of the cross – or is it a blessing? I leave you to think on that.

There are some steep climbs but eventually we reach Ketton – or sorry, should that be Zubiri? – which is not quite so picturesque as many of the towns and villages we've walked through. We cross a lovely historic bridge, having walked with an Australian teacher and her husband, and carry on for mile after mile before reaching (let's be honest) a trucker's motel. Clean, tidy but functional. But is it the set for Crossroads? However there is 24/7 TV with sub-titles (they speak Basque) and Jean manages to get the TV switched off just as Liverpool are about to bang one in the back of the net! Typical. Meanwhile two Russian salads later and tuna in tomato sauce, we retire, well-fed but rather sore, to our beds. Yet having opened our eyes we have seen real life and the reality of God...



Day 4

**Off to meet Nehemiah!**

Fancy a swim? Not in a former swimming pool now turned green as a garden pond we don't. Having enjoyed a basic but perfectly adequate, accommodation, we are blessed with a lovely breakfast whilst truckers look on. We stretch once again and then we are all off once more. The walk takes us past not a cement works, but a magnesium plant.

As I walk, I encounter an interesting but very fit 72-year-old gentleman from South Africa. I am round and he is thin. He talks about how he runs from Jo'burg to St Petersburg each year. Not that far then! He has only done this run twenty-two times, so not that often I am pleased to report.

He has also walked canyons, deserts and across mountain ranges. I have only walked in Derbyshire, Snowdonia, the Lakes and Scotland, not forgetting Oakham High Street. Oh dear! However, we both stop in our tracks as we reach a tiny abbey church. I want to pop in and say thank you God for letting me be a Reader in the Church of England for the last 19 years, he wishes to get a stamp on his Camino passport. I carry on as there are a large group of American students getting theirs stamped as well.

The path now gets narrow and we find ourselves walking alongside a river. It is refreshing, beautiful and calming. We even see the reflection of the trees in the water. There is a lovely stillness here in this moment. But onwards, alas, we must go to the

city of Pamplona. To give you an idea of what sort of city then think of York. The outskirts are tree lined, clean, urban and stylish, and we walk 4km through the city until we reach the medieval walls. And what walls they are. Has Nehemiah been here we ask? They are certainly impressive. I can just picture him walking along them. We enter the walled city, find our luxury hotel (no joke, really swish) and see lovely streets with tall multicoloured houses. A really Bohemian city if there ever was.

Day 5

**The narrow path or the wide road. Meeting God?**

After such luxury accommodation, we find it is time to move on again. Legs are sore and we are tired, but onwards we must go. Off we head out of the citadel and back onto the suburban footpath. But the streets are tree-lined, the traffic lights have green people walking to show you that you must cross, and you can only cross on green. We pass through a large park with a lovely wide path before hitting the hard track once again. The going is not too bad but at times you have to be really careful. Keeping your eyes open for the way-markers – the yellow arrows, shells or even shells set in the path – is key. Often the nice clean path looks so inviting, only to turn out to be the wrong way.

We gradually come to the edge of the city, saying hello to the same folk as we go along. Now we see the giant wind turbines standing on the horizon and set off to climb up to see them. It is a nice gentle climb but worth every step. The views are amazing. You can see for miles and miles. The really nice thing at the top is the lovely smiling lady, doing her stretches but blessing everyone and smiling. She has knee supports but a big beaming smile. Next to her on the floor is a large stone heart. How excellent.

We head down to Puente de la Reina, a medieval town with long narrow streets and a huge church and beautiful bridge. We stay in lovely accommodation with the smallest bath in Christendom. But it does us proud.

## Day 6

**Help me to leave the past behind – St Brendan the Navigator**

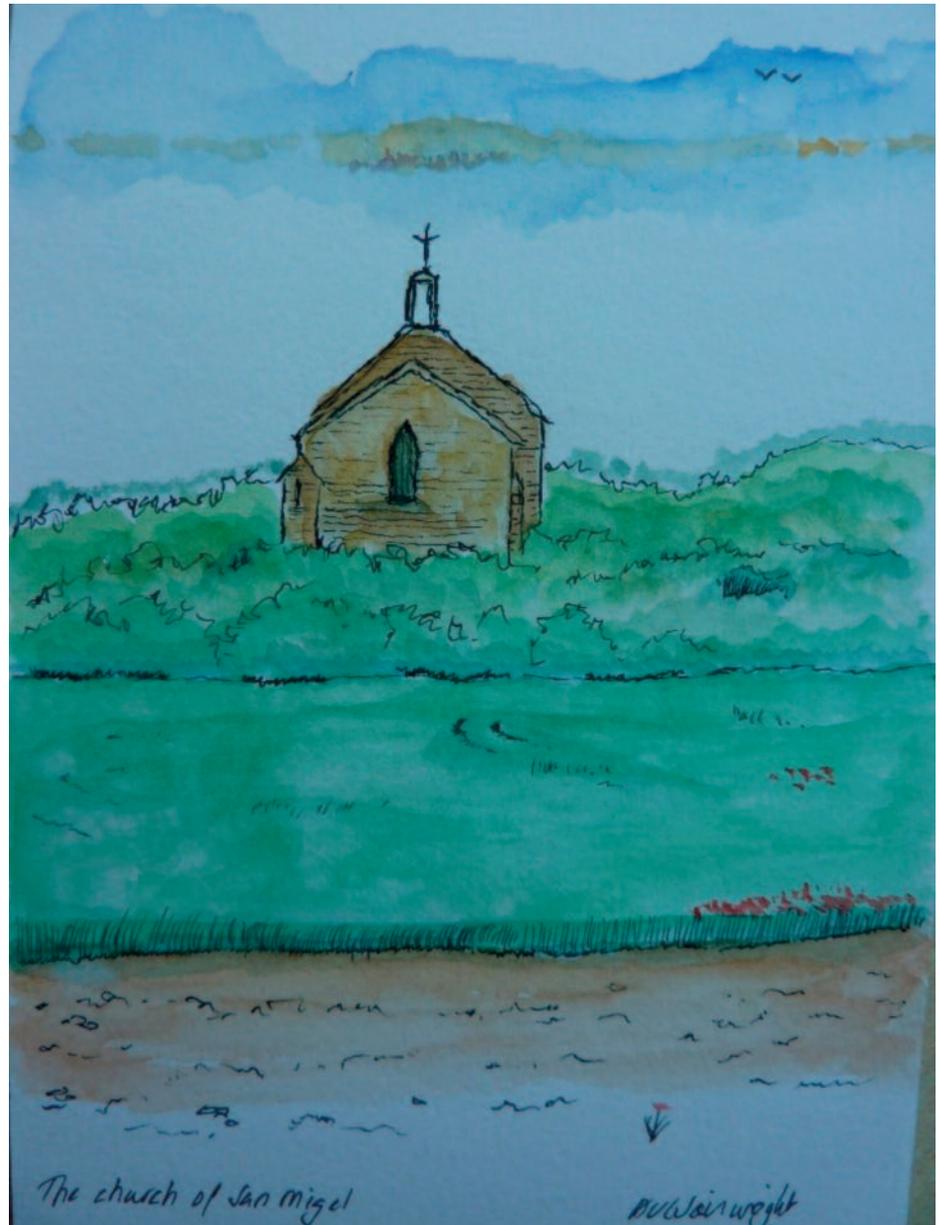
After doing my ablutions in the tiniest bath in Spain, we breakfast with a stressed waitress who is seemingly working all alone. By the time she has gone back and forth more times than a yoyo we make ready to go and I shoot off at a real pace. Am I Linford Christie though? Sure, enough I motor along with all Bon Camino as I go but there is a dust cloud behind me. But why? What is the urgency? Why rush? So, I decide to drop a gear and walk with others in the group, chatting, laughing and just walking as we go. Again it is very hot, but I pull my neck scarf around my ears and don my man scarf/prayer shawl. Given the urgency I have lapsed into I decide to pray for all those I feel need our prayers. This re-focuses my mind and softens my pace. As I walk along, I see a guy about my age walking along with a rosary attached to his rucksack. I, in international language, point to his rosary and tell him that I will pray for him and ask him to pray for me. It is agreed and so we will.

When I set off on the Camino, I took with me the prayer of St Brendan the Navigator which talks about the ability to leave the past behind and to have faith to move into the future, to be sure that God is always there and that no experience is wasted whether good or bad. Will I learn?

## Day 7

**The road to Emmaus?**

Somehow, we have reached our final day of walking. The weather has changed but we are well fed and watered. I have sustained a small bite just above the sock line but I am not alone. Two of us have also been bitten. Luckily, I have some tea tree oil, which is fantastic, and I rub anti-mosquito cream on my ankles. I do not wish to drop out now. We don our wet weather gear, fill our water bottles and collect some free fruit from breakfast before heading out. Today we are relaxed and just drinking in the terrain. Sure, it is only 13 degrees centigrade and it is raining. But we are from England,



*Help me to journey beyond the familiar  
and into the unknown.  
Give me the faith to leave old ways and break fresh ground with You.  
Christ of the mysteries,  
I trust You to be stronger than each storm within me.  
I will trust in the darkness and know  
that my times, even now, are in Your hand.  
Tune my spirit to the music of heaven,  
and somehow, make my obedience count for You. Amen.*

that green and pleasant land, and rain is nothing new to us.

The countryside is rolling and beautiful. The paths are wider, well surfaced and generally level. We all walk along as one big group but as we do, I cannot help but enjoy the conversation again and turn aside just to listen to the little bird singing a solo in a bush, this is truly splendid. And then suddenly there is a sign that just seems to spring up from nowhere

and now we realise that we have done it! We had reached Los Arcos.

So, did I see Jesus? I saw a young dude American Jesus, sandals, staff and back pack bouncing along. I saw an older Jesus carrying his burden up the mountain. I saw a real ale Jesus, floppy hat, pony tail and beard with a thumbs up and then I saw Jesus just ambling along, carrying a pack, a pilgrim stick but with a happy look and a smile.

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inspired by watching the Camino on TV, Brian Sewell's Naked Pilgrim and our Nordic Walking group getting the chance to go, set my mind upon sensing that God wanted me to do this.

So, have I come back from the Camino with plan C duly loaded onto a hard drive or stored in my digital cloud? Certainly not. But I have an appreciation more than ever before that actually to explore as Charles de Foucauld suggests is perhaps where I am meant to be. This is not easy but something that takes time and patience to get to grips with.

I certainly get a sense that this is what Jesus did daily. As we know he would so often withdraw for prayer and listening. Indeed, this has been the inspiration perhaps behind the monastic and contemplative life.

I do not have it quite right yet but as luck has it, I have another chance to walk a different part of the Camino next year with many of my Nordic Walking Camino Amigos. I certainly found it a rich and fascinating experience forming new friendships and being challenged in my thinking. And yes, I did think I caught a glimpse of God in many various guises. The question is will I think and enjoy those questions in the years to come.

To finish... a prayer by Charles de Foucauld

*Father I abandon myself  
into your hands.  
Do with me what you will.  
Whatever you do  
I will thank you.*

Day 7

### **Back home to the utility room, lots of dirty laundry and a chance to reflect**

So why the heck should you go on a pilgrimage?

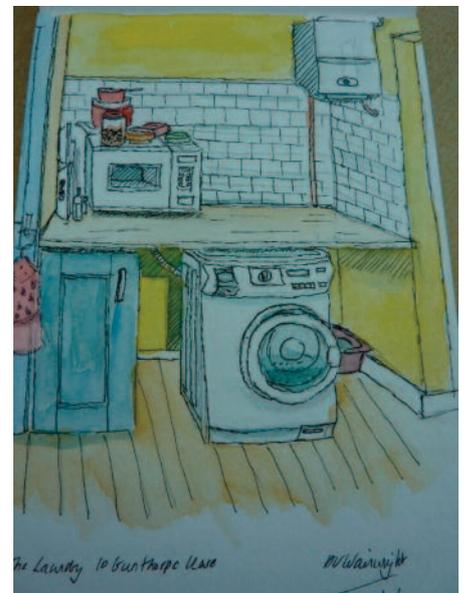
Pilgrimage has been part of Christian practice for many centuries. It has been a particularly popular way of trying to find out where God is leading you next but also a reminder that we are on a journey through life.

After the Reformation pilgrimage was discouraged, perhaps being seen as a Roman Catholic practice. However, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* might have helped to revive thinking about pilgrimage. In recent times it appears to have become popular once more. I certainly remember the term 'gone walkabout' emerging in the late 1970s and 80s as a way of

just stopping what you are doing and going wandering off to the hills. In addition, the recent phenomenon of having a gap year, either before or after university, has been popular, or of course the idea of doing this as a career break.

So, is it an excuse for an awfully nice meandering holiday or does it have any purpose? For me, I have had a hectic and demanding 20-odd years of various changes and challenges, some out of choice, though not many, and I know that I am not alone. I certainly recall how one high street retailer made an announcement that they only had plan A because there is no plan B. I know from experience that we have our dreams and wonderful ideas as our plan A but the reality turns out to be more plan B.

Taking time to stop and listen to God seemed a good thing to me and so,



# What my faith means to me

## Margaret and Geoffrey Foot

In this first contribution to the new 'What my faith means to me' series, Margaret and Geoffrey Foot reflect on their Christian journeys of faith and offer a fascinating insight into the joys and challenges of Christian worship and service. They suggest ways forward for new Christians and explain what would sustain their faith if cast away on the proverbial desert island!

### Margaret

As a cross-bred child (German Jewish father/Lutheran Danish mother) where religion, among war and other factors, had destroyed my family, religion was a forbidden topic. Mother arrived with me, aged six, in England, and had to get any job available. The Sally Ann were amazing. They found her work cooking for a college and Sundays made no difference to her. They did to me. No school. No shops, library, or anything open in those days, except church – which was forbidden to me. However, in my wanders I found a Sunday School meeting in a small hall. It was a wonderful hour, but when the others went into the adjoining church I fled. But not before seeing the magnificent altar and nave with a presiding golden father figure in the ceiling.

### A Faith for Life

My mother gradually had to ignore my church attendances with the various schools I went to, as she had neither the language nor the time to withdraw me. My need for 'something' grew. In the sixth form, as a new girl, a large group of friendly girls made me very welcome, and gradually drew me with them to Girl Crusaders each Sunday. It was here I grew my faith, culminating in an evening, at a Girl Guide camp with a Christian Guider, where I finally committed my life to God and His Son Jesus.

By now Mother entirely ignored my attendance at various churches. One evening at the local parish church there was an urgent appeal for a Sunday School teacher. The young man had been called up for conscription, and did not think much of this girl looking after his precious class of eight boys. However, he

made me follow Sunday School with church service. He was in the choir, so I joined too. (Women were not welcome but altos were useful). On leave he came to inspect his class. The rest is history. When telling Mother we were going to marry her only comment was 'How dreadful, goes to church and has no money.' Over the years they came to an understanding, especially as she lived with us for the last 22 years of her life. A little aside here – she developed a brain tumour, but for some months before had gone for her usual evening walk, but not taking the dogs. Geoffrey followed her one evening and found she was attending a Salvation Army meeting. When very shaky towards the end of her life she relented and let him take her to the meetings.

### Psalms and Questions

My faith sustained me over nearly 50 years of doctoring patients as a GP. Nowadays I would find it impossibly hard to be politically correct. Most of my career was next door to the church in an urban area which, as in many of these densely populated areas, had a community feeling almost like a village. They all knew I went to church and acted accordingly. So often I needed prayer before handling a difficult or sad situation.

Geoffrey has a very solid faith that has sustained and helped me (and many others) over the years when I have had doubts and dips in my faith.

Choir and music are, and always have been, hugely important in my church life. Unfortunately I'm very much a Martha and prefer activity to contemplation. The hymn 'Forth in thy name O Lord, I go' is my daily offering. Parts of the innumerable anthems, hymns, psalms and canticles I have sung are ever with

me when needed. The Bible passage where Jesus gives just two commands (Mark 12.30-31 – to love God with heart and mind and one's neighbour as oneself) is the one I try to keep before me.

Yes, of course I have doubts and problems with my faith. Do I really believe in a Virgin Birth? In this vast and impossible universe where is God? Why are we right and half the world have other religions and views and are wrong? I don't need the answers – I just believe and have faith. How, you may ask if new to the Christian life, can I really believe all that, and where should I go? The answer is simple. Try it and see. It's there.

The book I would take to a desert island book would be the full music Ancient and Modern Hymns and Songs – and please may I have a keyboard too?

### Geoffrey

27 December 1935. I have kept the date every year since. It's the day my brother was born!

Five boys in a three-bedroomed council house were unwelcome with a difficult birth taking place. I was shepherded off to my first choir practice – my brothers were regulars – which was then followed by 85 years of Psalms: ALL the set verses at two choir practices, and two Sunday services a week. I revelled in a world of worms and feathered fowls, dashing children against rocks, fair grounds, hands whiter than snow, a man-eating enemy, and hundreds more (these are all in the Psalms).

Find some for yourself – just go through a couple of dozen. You may also find the beginnings of a sense of God, as I did. What I did not realise was that my God was offering me a relationship and asking me to accept him.



At 16, Sunday School was too boring, and again I was shepherded (the story of my life) into Sunday School teaching. That forced me into trying to understand what the Psalms, Bible, Church and worship, were all about. Sermons, books and lectures didn't take me far. Hymns did: I came to know that I had this relationship (belief) and did not need to 'understand' – just trust and accept.

### Taste and See

The study for licensing as Lay Reader entailed ploughing through the Athanasian creed, the 39 Articles and an acquaintance with the Canons of the C of E. I got a lot of facts and slick answers but came no nearer to an 'understanding' of 'Christ died for my sins', the meaning of the Crucifixion or Sacrifice. However, I found a great deal of understanding what it was all about in the hymns, where I found the Loving God familiar in the relationship I had been given. Okay, their theology is dubious on occasion. A God offering a service of shepherding, and who would lighten troubles, not pile them on, when I trusted and accepted. That's a chance you take. Yes, it is not natural, or easy all the time, but Psalm 34 helps... O taste and see. I know I mustn't tempt God, but in that relationship try trusting and accepting – it works!

Over nearly 85 years my relationship with the Jesus of the Bible; the Father in the wonders of the world; the Holy Spirit who seems to open doors for me as appropriate (not always necessarily conveniently); a sense of the Mystery of the Great Trinity all have impinged on my faith... obviously a throwback to the Lay Reader training which was not appreciated at the time.

I am English and an Anglican so the fable goes: it's against the grain fully to lay my soul bare, so this will be stilted. How much easier to recite the glorious times and surprising results I have been shepherded, dragooned or dragged into by my relationship – which is my faith with God. I know in two months' time I will I wish I had spent a thousand words describing what I really mean!

### Tell God All About It

Failures? Disappointments in faith? Yes, plenty. The biggest trouble comes to me when I know I have the power or money to do something. The urge. Why not do it? It's my right. I can = so I will regardless.

Please, if you're new to your relationship with God, join the club, find Christians with whom you can share the bounty on offer. A very personal point: choose a Christian

spouse or partner, if already committed bring them over, a tremendous boost. Church (the place where Christians meet) is important: you're there to bolster that relationship; after-service coffee and companionship of the family gathered together are a bonus.

However this is the place where the Devil is active. Very covertly the Devil wants you believe there is a difference between the hierarchy of the meeting place you land in on the one hand, and the Church as a local family led by the priest or whatever you call them. Don't believe it. The hierarchy, lay and clergy, are all Christian humans seeking to show the love of God. The hierarchy will do odd things and make rules that seem unhelpful. It's not easy: bear with them; just show forbearance, it's just possible they are right – they have been at it for centuries. Tell God all about it... he's good at dealing with the Devil.

I would take my iPad to the desert island, containing the combined original Hymns Ancient and Modern with the Psalter as we sang it all those years ago. I could leave my saxophone behind – as Margaret is taking a keyboard!

# What do you call Home?

## Ellie Dimou

When the Editor suggested I could write about my experiences and moving to a new home in Peterborough my mind was overflowed with my notions of home. These are my definitions of home as they have accumulated during the recent years.

Probably there is no better way to find out what home is but by being away from it, whether this happens of one's own accord or because of circumstances. Many people leave their home – their house, their family and their country – to flee war, others to seek a better life free from abuse, unemployment or lack of hope for the future. Other people leave their homes to study or take a new job opportunity. Whatever the reasons why one leaves, one always longs for a home. When we talk about home most of us do not only refer to the house, city or country we live in, that is the actual material environment we inhabit, rather we refer to the place where we feel safe, accepted, appreciated and loved, in which we live in a community where we can prosper, with people and a place we can identify with.

The Creator or builder of every house is God. God is also by extension the Creator of every home (Hebrews 3.4). He makes us abide first in the womb of our mother, and then in the security of a family, a community, a church or school or nation and all other communities in which we would ideally feel safe and identify with the place and the people.

Long ago our first father, Adam, and a neighbour (Satan) became discontented with the Father-Creator's home arrangements. Satan left his home in the heavens to come to earth and cause trouble, and Adam found himself in a position where he was evicted from Paradise. Since then it takes some struggle for us to reach out and return to our home in God's presence.

What do I mean by that? Many people still happen to live and grow old in happy homes relatively functional communities where things are done and there is a sense of identity and goals are accomplished one would argue. Yes, this is true and

shows the generosity and grace of God. Yet it's obvious that many people do not have a house or a home or find themselves being or feeling homeless. More importantly many people are not at home with themselves, with God or with other people. How can this be cured? And how and where have I found my home? These are the questions I would like to answer now.

### Finding God

Acts 17.24-28 says *'The **God** who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and **does not live in temples built by human hands**. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the **boundaries of their lands**. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. "For in him we live and move and have our being." As some of your own poets have said, "We are his offspring."*

I have highlighted in **bold** the words and phrases I am inviting you to notice and join me in this line of thought: God has made the heavens and the earth – all material reality. Yet God's being is essentially spiritual, he does not live as we do in material homes or houses – he is not bound by materiality and limits. The same God has created this material world and nations which inhabit this Earth within the boundaries of their lands, and has done this in order to offer to all the opportunity to reach out for him and find him.

How can we find one who is not a material being? This passage explains that he is not far from any of us

(regardless of where we are geographically/materially located). The really critical understanding comes at the end of the passage, where the apostle Paul endorses that in God we live and move and have our being. Light-bulb moment! God is our Home. We can feel safe,



*Ellie is a friend and former parishioner of All Saints, Oakham, who first came to us in 2013 from her home in Greece, becoming a regular and much loved member of the community while she lived in Oakham. She is now a Verger at Peterborough Cathedral.*

accepted, appreciated, loved, belonging, identifying and in community with our most precious Lord regardless of where we are or what we face in life.

Jesus himself has expressed this when he said, as recorded in John 14.23: *'Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.'*

Father, Son and Holy Spirit wait only for us to give them the green light so that they come into spiritual communion with us and establish a home in us and with us.

### Finding Ourselves

After finding that God is our home and is at home with us we might re-evaluate things and understand that we can find a home of solace in ourselves too, both in our bodies and in our whole being. Yes, our own self in connection to God is a Home. As a consequence of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in us we can identify our bodies as a place where God dwells: *'Do you not know that your*

*bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?'* (1 Corinthians 6.19a).

As one comes into a loving relationship with God a new sense of self-appreciation and self-worth comes into existence within us. We can love ourselves as we start to notice and appreciate in ourselves the godliness of our being in the presence of the Holy Spirit. We can take the home of our self wherever we might go. We will find that this self now inhabited by God is a source of new inspiration and renewal of life that no one and nothing can take away from us. *'But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life'* (John 4.14).

### Finding the Church

The Church is called the household or the family of God – the pillar and the foundation of truth (1 Timothy 3.14). This Church does not refer to a material building but refers to the

community of believers who represent the body of Christ on earth. This community and its activities, ministry and worship can become a home where one can belong, feeling safe, accepted, appreciated and loved regardless of where one is located geographically, culturally or emotionally.

By now you might have guessed what I personally call my home. Now and in the future I have a safe home with God, myself and my loving Church – whose members include my friends in Oakham who will always be my brothers and sisters regardless of where I found myself the following months and years. In England I have found a blessed home in every way since 2013. I am currently still working in Peterborough Cathedral and I worship in St. Paul's Church in Peterborough (the Railwayman's church).

I send you all best wishes for Lent and Easter, and look forward to hearing Oakham Church news through The Link and when we meet.

## Saying 'Yes to Life' – Lent and Lambeth 2020

### + John, Bishop of Brixworth

This summer almost 1,000 bishops from all over the world will be gathering in Canterbury for the Lambeth Conference. Some of the bishops, including from our link diocese in Korea, will be spending a few days beforehand at Launde Abbey with me and Bishop Donald.

A key theme of the conference will be the global climate emergency that is already impacting the diocese from which some of the bishops serve. For example, low-lying areas flooded by rising sea levels and conflict triggered by expanding deserts, forcing people to move and compete for scarce land. Archbishop Justin has recorded a short interview highlighting this aspect of Lambeth 2020, which you can find at <https://vimeo.com/359740285>

As we approach the season of Lent, I'd like to commend two ways in which we can engage with these

important matters from the perspective our Christian faith:

The Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Book, *Saying Yes to Life* by Ruth Valerio, is a brilliant exploration of what it means to look after God's world, reflecting on creation themes including light, water, land and seasons alongside environmental concerns. It's full of good stories and insights. Archbishop Justin says that this book 'is perfect for individuals and groups to reflect, pray and be challenged together'. Copies are currently available for loan from the Diocesan library at Bouverie Court.

The Church of England's Lent Campaign, #LiveLent – Care for God's Creation, has produced challenges for 40 days in adult and children's versions that are available as a pocket-sized booklet, via an app or by email. The aim is to broaden our view of Christ's redeeming mission.

The campaign has over 13,000 sample copies – your church may have some. The daily Bible readings, reflections and suggested actions link with Ruth's book. I think both pervasions are really inspiring and great fun! If you wish to order copies of these books, contact [environment@peterborough-diocese.org.uk](mailto:environment@peterborough-diocese.org.uk)

In Peterborough diocese, we are aiming to make 2020 a year of greater focus on our stewardship of God's earth as the fifth of the Five Marks of Mission – tell the Good News of Jesus; teach the faith; tend for all in his name; transform society in line with Kingdom values; treasure God's creation. Throughout 2020, look out for new initiatives from the Diocesan Environmental Team.

With my prayers and best wishes for a holy and world-changing Lent,



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# Christmas Customs Past and Present

**Brian Chester**

The Christmas decorations are down and packed away, the sound of carols just a distant echo and the Three Kings are riding back to their home lands – but now, in these Spring months, is a good time think again of the many customs and traditions that, although on the periphery of the wonder of Christ coming into the world, are still part of the significance of the festive celebrations.

I have clear recollections of early Christmases (if a little distant now) with many memories around family gatherings for the festive feast. And for children, the Christmas pudding held the excitement of who would be the lucky one to discover a reward among the rich, fruity delight which had taken so long to prepare. The reward was a silver sixpence – maybe bearing the head of Queen Victoria and so containing real silver! – which to a five- or six-year-old was a coin to be cherished, albeit a little stickily. For

the older members of the party, the discovery of this inedible part of the pudding was said to bring good luck in the coming year – unless it was bitten into and damaged a tooth or accidentally swallowed! Maybe health and safety intervened or modern coinage could not replace the ‘magic’ of the silver sixpence, but this tradition now seems to have mostly disappeared from the Christmas table. Many others remain, however, not least the traditions and customs that accompany the process of preparing the pudding. Apparently this particular dish began in the 14th century as a porridge made of beef and mutton with raisins, currants, prunes, wines and spices. Called ‘frumenty’, it was eaten as a fasting meal in preparation for the Christmas festivities. It evolved into a dessert during the early 1600s, was banned by the Puritans during the Commonwealth and re-introduced in 1714 by King George I.

grandfather of the family to carry the pudding but refuse to enter the room until the family shouts loudly enough to bring him in. It usually takes several attempts!

Continuing the food theme, mince pies were first made with shredded meat, fruit and spices – including cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg each meant to symbolise the gifts of the Three Wise Men – all baked in a rectangular case to represent the crib.

Probably not to be recommended but it has been suggested that good luck comes from eating a mince pie on each of the 12 days of Christmas.

Just to round up our festive food traditions, the turkey did not arrive in Britain – from the Americas – until the 16th century and only then adorned the tables of the rich. It gained popularity in the late 19th century and has held its place since despite incursions by roast goose and roast beef.

## Crackers

While still at the table, where would we be without a cracker to pull? Tom Smith, a London sweet maker, thought of the idea after gaining inspiration from traditional paper-wrapped French bonbons. His first attempt in the late 1840s was a bit of a damp squib – a cracker without a ‘crack’. The idea did not take off until he found a way to give them the necessary snap. His sons added the hats and novelty gifts – no clue about the origin of the jokes!

Sir Henry Cole, who played a key role in the introduction of the Penny Black postage stamp, is credited, with artist John Horsley, with creating the first Christmas card in 1843.



THE CHRISTMAS TREE.

*Lithograph in The Illustrated London News in the winter of 1848. In 1840, Queen Victoria married her first cousin, Prince Albert, of Germany. Albert brought with him the tradition of decorating a tree as a symbol of life during the long, cold winter.*

## Stirring Things Up

The Sunday before Advent is the time for stirring as the opening words of the Prayer Book Collect for the day are: ‘Stir-up, we beseech thee, O Lord...’, and every traditional pudding maker will know to include 13 ingredients to represent Jesus and his disciples and each member of the family should take it in turns to stir the pudding from east to west in honour of the Wise Men. Setting brandy alight is said to represent Christ’s passion and the sprig of holly his crown of thorns.

Those who enjoy a noisy conclusion to the Christmas dinner can follow a custom that requires the father or

## Deck the Halls

Prince Albert is said to have begun our addiction to the Christmas tree when he adorned Windsor Castle with one in 1841. The tradition was already well established in Northern Europe as a symbol of rebirth but in Britain it took some time to work down through the social scale. The decoration of homes with evergreens goes way back – we are told that pagans used the branches to remind them of spring; for Romans they were part of a December festival for Saturn, their god of agriculture; for Christians, the evergreen boughs are reminders of eternal life. Wreaths, being a circle, have no beginning or end and so symbolise the eternity of God.

Leaving stockings out on Christmas Eve is attributed to the legend of St Nicholas. Known as a giver of gifts, he deposited gold down the chimney of a man who had no dowry for his unmarried daughters – and the gift fell into stockings left hanging to dry. The Dutch, we are told, called St Nicholas Sinterklaas which we interpreted as Santa Claus.

## Carols and Capers

Our liking for carols goes way back - possibly to solstice celebrations - when carols were dances accompanied by singing. Early Christians replaced the pagan songs but it was not until 1223 when St Francis of Assisi included 'canticles' in his Nativity Plays that the idea began to spread. One reference reports that in the Middle Ages the practice of singing and dancing reached the point where it was banned from church. The result was that carollers took to the streets going from house to house. Oliver Cromwell stopped all such activities from 1647 to 1660. The first Christmas Carol Service is said to have taken place in Truro in 1880.

If you think we are bound by our customs, many other countries have their own. In Austria a ghoulish creature called 'Krampus', the evil accomplice of St Nicholas, is said to wander the streets in search of badly-behaved children. While in the Netherlands children eagerly place their shoes by the fire in the hope that Sinterklaas will fill them with small gifts and treats in the night.

Traditionally, carrots are left in the shoes for the companion of Sinterklaas, a white horse named Amerigo; in the Venezuelan capital of Caracas, city dwellers make their way to Mass on roller skates with many of the roads being closed to traffic.

## Wassailing

One tradition that moves us into the New Year is that of enjoying a draught of wass-ale – a drink of mulled ale, curdled cream, roasted apples, eggs, cloves, ginger, nutmeg and sugar. Not surprisingly it is a custom not often followed today, but is a custom that has its origins in Anglo-Saxon times when the phrase 'waes hael' was a toast of good health. The potion was prepared in large silver or pewter bowls and carried into the room with much ceremony to be consumed on New Year's Eve and Twelfth Night – often to a rendition of:

*Here we come a wassailing,  
Among the leaves so green,  
Here we come a wassailing,  
So fair to be seen.*

*Love and joy come to you,  
And to you your wassail too,  
And God bless you and send you,  
A happy New Year,  
And God send you,  
A happy New Year.*

The cider apple orchards of

Herefordshire and the West Country are still the focus of noise and dance on Old Twelfth Night (around the 17th January) as wassailers gather to shoo away evil spirits and 'wake up' the trees so they will produce a good crop! Closer to home, there are Wassail celebrations at Stamford, led by the the Stamford Community Orchard Group, and at Woolsthorpe Manor, the home of Isaac Newton's apple tree. The Woolsthorpe Wassail song is relatively modern and rather untraditional, beginning:

*At Woolsthorpe in Lincolnshire  
there stands a tree;  
An apple fell from it by pure gravity  
Said Isaac,  
'That apple, now how can it fall  
Straight downwards  
and never fly upwards at all?'*

Forty days after Christmas is Candlemas, which many people would stay is when the Christmas season really ends. This is when we hear about the infant Jesus being brought to the Temple where he meets Simeon and Anna, two faithful people who have waited all their lives for his appearing. So you could say that Advent beings with waiting, and Christmas is a time when all the waiting is fulfilled...

*Additional material supplied by Ann Blackett*



*Wassailing at Woolsthorpe (courtesy National Trust)*

# Food for Thought

## Beryl Kirtland

One of the things which makes home special is eating together. We're told that it happens less and less as families eat at different times and in front of screens, but there's no doubt that eating together is worth doing, whether as families or friends or even larger groups. We all have memories of special occasions where the food was as good as the company – a birthday meal, a wedding breakfast, a harvest lunch, or soup and a sandwich halfway up a mountain.

Tasty, nutritious and easy to eat, this is a recipe for cold days, and as we go toward Lent you could prepare and cook it thoughtfully, and send a donation to a charity which feeds the hungry, or put something extra in the Foodbank collection.

## Cheese and Lentil Bake

### Ingredients:

175g (6oz) red lentils  
350 ml (12 fl oz) water  
110g (4oz) grated cheddar cheese  
1 onion, peeled and finely chopped  
1 tablespoon fresh parsley, chopped  
1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper  
A little lemon juice  
One large egg  
3 tablespoons single cream (or alternative)  
Salt and pepper

If you do not want to use cream use low fat fromage-frais or yoghurt. Use any melting cheese you have instead of cheddar.

This is a very good tempered recipe. Double the amount and have hot one day, cold the next.

What makes a really good family meal is the lentil loaf served with ratatouille or tomato sauce, roast potatoes and a green vegetable.

### Ratatouille

Approx 225g onions cooked slowly with 2 cloves of garlic in a small amount of oil until translucent. Add approx 450g courgettes sliced, red pepper chopped, large tin tomatoes, salt and pepper and cook for about half an hour. Serve hot.



### What to do:

Cook lentils with the water in a tightly covered pan for 10–15 minutes. The mixture should cook to a stiff puree. Add more water if necessary.

Remove the pan from the heat.

In a separate bowl lightly beat the egg and cream.

Add the grated cheese, chopped onion, parsley, pepper and lemon juice to the saucepan. Pour the egg mixture over this and mix together.

The mixture should be soft and runny.

Grease a suitable dish or loaf tin with the butter.

Place mixture in the dish. Top with a little grated cheese if you wish.

Bake 45-50 minutes in a pre-heated oven mark 5, 375F, 190C.



### Tomato Sauce

Chopped onion sautéed in a little oil until soft with or without garlic and or some herbs, add tin of tomatoes, salt and pepper. Cook for about half an hour. Add about 2 tablespoons of tomato puree to thicken.



# Hospitality in the House of the Church

**Ann Blakett**

A couple of months ago I joined a group of friends who sing, to travel to Rome, one of the major cities in early Christianity. Every day we sang a service in a different church. As well as the massive and well-known basilicas, there are many smaller and very ancient churches, among them San Giorgio Velabro, close by the Roman Forum and built from many stones and columns from earlier buildings, and the smaller Basilica di Santo Stefano Rotondo on the Caelian hill, consecrated in AD 470 and well off the beaten track. So many lovely, prayerful places with beautiful mosaics and wonderful acoustics, and many dating from the early days of Christianity.

But in the earliest days, as we can read in the New Testament, people met in private homes, sometimes secretly in times of persecution, sometimes openly in places where Christians were tolerated and relatively safe.

*'They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favour with all the people. And every day God added to their number those who were being saved.'* Acts 2.42-47

## House Churches

There's not much standing evidence and plenty of speculation as to the form these houses might have taken. A building dating from around 212/3 AD, excavated in Syria, in a place called Dura-Europos, seems to have had a hall for gathering, which may have had a table at one end, another room for teaching and preparing people to be baptised, an elaborately decorated water bath for baptisms and space for storage of food, clothing and other goods to be given to the poor. Closer to home, the Roman villa in Lullingstone, Kent, (destroyed in around 380 AD) contains a set of rooms with Christian mosaic decoration, which might have been used by a Christian household in Roman Britain. Throughout the Roman Empire, as the numbers of Christians grew and became



distinct from the Jewish people worshipping in local synagogues, they adapted houses for worship, teaching, meeting and charitable work. After the Emperor Constantine adopted Christianity as the official religion of the Empire in 312 AD they were able to build churches, mostly based on the Roman basilica – a kind of meeting hall with a central area, sometimes side aisles and a raised platform at one end.

## All Are One

There may not be much archaeology of the house churches belonging to the very early Christians, but the kind of hospitality they practised is clear in what was being written at the time. Jesus' message of loving your neighbour as yourself was present as households comprising citizens, their slaves and members of the household who had been given their freedom came together to pray, listen to the Scriptures and share the Eucharist. The message was radical and countercultural; 'All are one in Christ Jesus'. Often these places are described as *domus ecclesiae*, or 'house of the church' – the church not being a building but the people who met regularly to remember and celebrate. At the end of the letter to the Romans, Paul sends greetings to Prisca and Aquila, a couple who had 'risked their necks' for him previously, and to 'the church in their house'. This might just be a household, or a wider gathering, as described in Paula Gooder's novel *Phoebe*. When Paul eventually came to Rome to stand trial, he hired a house and for two years met other Christians there, praying and teaching (Acts 28.30). Sometimes it went wrong – Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth describes a situation where the people had lost the plot, not sharing but eating individually, some getting drunk and some going hungry (1

*Left: Mosaic in the Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves and the Fishes at Tabgha near the Sea of Galilee (Yam Kinneret), Israel (Grauesel, Wikimedia). Traditionally this is said to be the place where Jesus fed 5,000 followers with five loaves of bread and two fish (Matthew 14.13).*

*Right: The Chair of St Augustine in Canterbury Cathedral (Ealdgyth, Wikimedia).*

Corinthians 11.17-33). It appears that they had not taken the message and their conversion to heart and had reverted to their earlier behaviour. Paul's letter puts them right in no uncertain terms.

## Holy Places

The places where the young Churches meet are holy places, where the people, the Body of Christ, assemble and where the scriptures are listened to and explained, new Christians are made through the waters of baptism, and where the bread is blessed, broken and shared. At first they housed informal gatherings, with a structure for worship gradually emerging. As the buildings developed, the worship grew more formal and the teaching more established. But the hospitality is still there, as this direction from the second-century *Didascalia of the Apostles* shows:

*If a poor man or a poor woman comes, whether they are from your own parish or from another, above all if they are advanced in years, and if there is not room for them, make a place for them, O bishop, with all your heart, even if you yourself have to sit on the ground.*

*You must not make any distinction between persons, if you wish your ministry to be pleasing before God.*

*When you are teaching, command and exhort the people to be faithful to the assembly of the church. Let them not fail to attend, but let them gather faithfully together. Let no-one deprive the church by staying away; if they do, they deprive the Body of Christ of one of its members.*

As well as beautiful and prayerful, joyful and Spirit-filled, let our churches and our communities also be hospitable!



# Joy Harvey

## Churchwarden of St Mary's Church Ashwell

Beryl Kirtland

Joy Harvey and her husband, Val, moved to Ashwell in 2001, and by 2003 she had become one of the churchwardens of St. Mary's Church in the village.

Having known Joy and Val from their days in Wharflands House at Oakham School, it was a pleasure for me to visit them in their home to talk with Joy about her life and faith. She was born in 1958 in Sutton Coldfield where her parents still live. Many happy memories of her childhood remain with her, not least of family annual summer holidays in a cottage on the beach at Steephill Cove on the Isle of Wight with her brother and twin sisters. Crabbing is a centuries-old tradition and with their little rowing boat this was one of their favourite pastimes too.

### Family Life

As a youngster at home, Sundays followed a set routine for the family: Sunday School in the morning at the local Methodist Church where her parents remain involved to the present day; always a roast lunch in the dining room with the best tablecloth and china; Dad with his

glass of sherry and the children tasked to identify the ingredients of his varied liquid 'concoctions'. The first child to finish their meal was allowed to choose a crispy nibble from the end of the joint. The children attended Crusaders between 3.00 and 4.00 before returning to the special treat of eating boiled egg in the drawing room whilst watching 'The Golden Shot'.

After tea Joy's father went to steward the 6.00 service before bringing the collection home for the family to count – childhood traditions never to be forgotten. Joy also has many fond memories of visiting her beloved grandparents on their rural Staffordshire farm, jumping on hay bales and learning to drive the Land Rover at an early age.

After taking a degree in Chemistry at the University of St Andrews and completing her PGCE at Cambridge University, Joy pursued her dream career of teaching, first in North Yorkshire and then, after her marriage to Val in 1983, at Oakham School. Joy loved her time as the Housemaster's wife in a boys' boarding house for 14 years, making the boys part of her family and being a part of their lives. Over the years many still keep in touch.

In 2000, the death of Val's brother Gawen brought a huge change in Joy and Val's lives, as Gawen's two children – Roz, aged 12 and John, 14 joined their family along with their own children – Ruth, 14, Andrew, 11, and Richard, 8. The need for a larger home brought about the move to Ashwell and to the St Mary's Church community.

### Reflecting God's Love

I asked Joy which was her favourite service and she replied 'I love participating in the Communion service with the overwhelming feeling that Christ died for me and



that I am loved by Him unconditionally'.

Joy feels that the challenge for Ashwell church is to reflect God's love beyond the church building in the village through practical care and friendship. She considers Ashwell a great place to live, with a good mix of people and with a wonderful sense of community fostered through a variety of social events.

For relaxation Joy enjoys being outside walking the dog, swimming, reading, baking, cooking, entertaining and, of course, spending time with the family. Holidays are spent visiting their children in UK, in Singapore and in Tasmania and in recent years 'bucket and spade' times in Wales with grandchildren... catching crabs, again!

As for the greatest influence on her life, beyond that of her God, her parents and her husband, Joy talks of the friendly fellowship she shares with members of her weekly Bible study group.

'How would you describe yourself in a few words?' I enquired... Pondering, she replied, 'enthusiastic, organised, broad-shouldered and welcoming' and she hopes that people might see her as 'loving and gentle'. Not complacent, she declared she would like to become 'ever more gracious' and she sees this very much as 'work in progress'.

Joy has a love of life which embodies all she does. The village of Ashwell is certainly fortunate to have her in their midst. Never have I known a person with a more fitting Christian name!



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