

BRF Ministries and me



Welcome to the first issue of BRF Ministries News in 2024. It has been a joy – and a great gift – over the last 25 years to have been involved with BRF Ministries. Although I had been a reader ('user', even) of *New Daylight* Bible reading notes before ordination in 1995, it was through my work as an early adopter of internet technology in the 1990s that the then editors asked if I would write an article about what was to become a mainstay of our lives in so many respects.

Since then I have written for and used *New Daylight* in the parish where I was vicar from 2003 to 2020. With my move to Rochester Cathedral in 2020 came the welcome invitation to edit *New Daylight*. I love working on *New Daylight* and I have also enjoyed having the opportunity to write timely reflective pieces at important national moments: during the pandemic, when the Queen died and for the Coronation. I have also written many books for BRF Ministries, mostly for Lent and Advent. Having pioneered such 'seasonal' books, these titles continue to be a mainstay of BRF Ministries' highly regarded devotional and teaching ministry, Living Faith.

I am also very lucky that Rochester Cathedral is a pioneering hub in a pioneering diocese for Anna Chaplaincy. Anna Chaplains and Anna Friends have a key role in our society's response to, affirmation of and care for all older people, and particularly those living with dementia as well as those who care for them.

Similarly, Messy Church is a vital staple of contemporary Christian ministry. Working with all ages, from the youngest to the oldest, Messy Church – 'church, but not as you know it' – is making church friendly, accessible and genuinely intergenerational. We're excited to be hosting 'Messy Cathedral' here in Rochester in April.

BRF Ministries is all about resourcing the inner journey of Bible reading, prayer and devotion which is lived out in Christian ethical action, service and worship. Crucially, these resources – books, Bible reading notes, courses, podcasts and events – can help 'join the dots' between prayer and action. As we welcome the new year, it's good to be reminded that all ministry needs to be reflective and biblically informed and all prayer and Bible reading needs expression in mission and ministry. BRF Ministries is here to help that happen.

Gordon Giles
Canon chancellor of
Rochester Cathedral

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Making a difference

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and more...

Pray with us...

In the words of our new BRF Ministries prayer

*Faithful God,
thank you for growing BRF
from small beginnings
into the worldwide family of BRF
Ministries.*

*We rejoice as young and old
discover you through your word
and grow daily in faith and love.
Keep us humble in your service,
ambitious for your glory
and open to new opportunities.
For your name's sake*

Amen

Our prayer resources can be found at brf.org.uk/pray



Anna Chaplaincy lead hands the baton on

Anna Chaplaincy pioneer and lead Debbie Thrower stood down from the ministry in November, 14 years after she founded the work in Alton in Hampshire: 'It's a bittersweet feeling,' says Debbie, 'handing on the baton to my colleagues as Anna Chaplaincy has been such an overwhelming part of my life, but it's time to practise what I preach and try to "age well." Part of that is about less "doing" and more "being"; going on growing spiritually and keeping relationships in good repair.'

*'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living
hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.'*

Hello from Julie and the fundraising team



A huge thank you to everyone who supported our Christmas message campaign, and purchased our Christmas cards and virtual gifts. In doing so, you are supporting the work and growth of our four ministries which aim to inspire people of all ages to grow in Christian faith.

Your generosity really does make a difference

and impacts people's lives every day. Just one example of how your support is invaluable is our Anna Chaplaincy ministry:

Currently 330 Anna Chaplains and 2-2,500 Anna Friends are offering spiritual care among older people who are often lonely, vulnerable and isolated. Your support enables us to train and equip this growing network across the UK. If you're in any doubt about what this work might mean to people, here are just two extracts from the many emails and letters we receive from those touched by this ministry. The first comes from a well-being coordinator at a care home where Anna Chaplaincy visits individuals fortnightly in their own rooms, holds a monthly communion service and also a very popular Vintage Messy Church with the local curate.

'There is no doubt in my mind that the spiritual care that you show to our residents, their families and friends, our staff and carers, has a significant impact on everybody's well-being. Our home is so much the better for you all being a part of our daily lives.'

'Our home is so much the better for you all being a part of our daily lives.'

And this testimony was given by a daughter at her mother's funeral:

'Dementia destroys so many things including one's faith, for you no longer have any reference points. We were so fortunate to have Evelyn, an Anna Chaplain, visit Mum regularly. There were some wonderful spiritual moments during those visits. Evelyn once asked Mum if she would like to pray and to our amazement she did - a prayer for one of her grandchildren.'

Thank you again for supporting our various fundraising activities and appeals throughout the year and enabling us to continue to impact the lives of people of all ages through Anna Chaplaincy, Living Faith, Messy Church and Parenting for Faith.

Julie

Julie MacNaughton, MCIOF (Dip)
Head of fundraising



Easter cards

Our beautiful range of everyday cards is available all year round and our Easter cards are on sale now.

Go to brfonline.org.uk/cards to browse the whole collection

Debbie Thrower says ‘au revoir’ to Anna Chaplaincy

Debbie looks back over her years with Anna Chaplaincy and says ‘My! How you’ve grown!’

Anna Chaplaincy has grown from one Anna Chaplain in 2014 – just me at first – to a national network of more than 330. From the start, I was certain we would grow. My experience of developing this approach to offering spiritual care for older people illustrates how sorely needed it is.

Getting older and living longer generally, brings all sorts of challenges – as well as compensations – post-retirement. The pandemic has thrown into relief how loneliness and social isolation among older people has become endemic.

Each Anna Chaplain has around two hundred encounters a month. In addition to the chaplains, each has, on average, eight volunteers working alongside them. There are now dozens of volunteer ‘Anna Friends’ working with network members, adding up to hundreds of thousands of people benefiting from this kind of support every year.

‘Hundreds of thousands of people benefiting from this support every year.’

It is a ministry of presence; accompanying, being with people, is at the heart of what we do. That might mean visiting an older widow or widower in their own home, taking a worship service in a care home, offering home Communion at a sheltered housing complex, dropping in regularly on a dementia café or starting one up from scratch.

Our blogs – well over a thousand of them since our website was launched –



‘The care of Anna Chaplaincy is extraordinary’, said Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby in an interview with Debbie last October. Read the whole story at annachaplaincy.org.uk/phenomenal for Debbie’s blog.

showcase what Anna Chaplains are up to in their local areas (annachaplaincy.org.uk/blog). Before Christmas many organise craft projects, making gifts such as knitted angels and holding crosses for care home residents. In summer they hold tea parties or special church services ‘Celebrating age’. Some even stage ambitious ‘Holiday at home’ events for those older people who can’t get away for a break. One Anna Chaplain is helping secondary school pupils spend placements in care homes to learn firsthand what it’s really like to grow old in a new ‘home’ setting.

Anna Chaplains are part of the community ‘glue’ which keeps young and old together, through shared activities as well as the pastoral visits so many people confined to home come to rely on. Often, touchingly, they’re asked to

take someone’s funeral because they knew the deceased best towards the end of their life.

For me, as my special relationship with Anna Chaplaincy takes on a new form, these recent quotes sum up the impact of this ministry among those of strong faith or none:

‘The prayers and candle with their light, brought comfort to Mum more than you will ever know, and thank you for your kindness and support to me.’

‘There is no doubt in my mind that the spiritual care that you show to our residents, their families and friends, our staff and carers has a significant impact on everybody’s well-being... [We’re] so much the better for you being a part of our daily living in the care home.’

New Anna Chaplaincy lead Debbie Ducille



Debbie Ducille, formerly responsible for church relationships, took over the lead role from Debbie Thrower in late November. She says:

‘When I joined the Anna Chaplaincy team 20 months ago, I reflected that: “Sometimes you encounter a ministry that is so bursting with life, potential and the transforming power of the Spirit, you just want

to join in!” Anna Chaplaincy felt like such a ministry then and I rejoice that this remains true, for me and many others, today. The ministry continues to grow rapidly both in number and stature as a trusted voice, promoting sensitive spiritual care as a gift to be made available to all in later life: a dream, perhaps, back in 2014 when the only Anna Chaplain in existence was Debbie Thrower.’

Messy Church – from the ashes



This month marks the first anniversary of a devastating fire which all but destroyed St Mark's Church in London's St John's Wood. A year on, the congregation meets in a marquee in the vicarage garden, overlooking the ruins of their burned out church. Reconstruction will be a long and painstaking process but there are already signs of new life emerging from the ashes, including a brand new Messy Church. Vicar Kate Harrison, Mother Kate to her Anglo-Catholic congregation, says 'To carry on in the same place is an act of defiance.' What does she mean?

'The first thing I saw on the morning after the fire was the spire: that spire, pointing to heaven, was just the most defiant thing I've ever seen. It said, "You can burn everything down but we are still pointing to heaven, we are still doing God's work."

'To carry on in the same place is an act of defiance.'

As services and activities resumed, Kate felt there was something missing and somewhat to her own surprise, that something was Messy Church. 'I'd always been quite sceptical about Messy Church, but after the fire I got this real sense of okay, now is the time. What I've seen happen since we've started is that we're not just having families come along, older people from the Sunday congregation are coming along on their own.'

Which is exactly what Kate hoped would happen: 'I've been really, really pushing it, that it's not a service just for families. It's a service for people who want to learn about faith and connect with God in a different way.'

So what impact is Messy Church having on people?

'It's proved to people that we can do stuff, we can still step out in faith, probably even more than we used to, and that whatever we do, God will provide and it will be awesome. At the first meeting, when I raised the



possibility of starting a Messy Church, it was the most negative meeting you could imagine. We're on London clay here and as soon as it rains it's like Glastonbury, so people said it would never work in the vicarage garden, and that was just for starters!'

'In the end I just had to say, "Please, please go along with me on this. I'm really asking you to trust me, because I'm trusting God." And the most amazing thing happened, these people who were so negative actually came along to the first session and got stuck in.'

'I'm really asking you to trust me, because I'm trusting God.'

'So it's actually strengthened the existing congregation in their faith, to step out. And over the next however many years it takes to rebuild this church, we've got to be stepping out.'

But it's not just the Sunday congregation whose faith is affected. 'A family came to the first couple of Messy Church sessions and then for the third one, the little boy was supposed to be going to something else. But when he saw his mum and sister getting ready for Messy Church he said, "No, you can't leave me out! I've got to come along to the best church ever!"'

Find out more about all that Messy Church has to offer at messychurch.org.uk

Messtival 2024!

**Saturday 2 March 2024,
10:00 am to 1:00 pm, on Zoom**

**Booking information here:
brfonline.org.uk/messtival2024**

Join us for a morning of inspiring workshops and affirming fellowship! Are you passionate about sharing Jesus creatively with your Messy Church community? Are you looking for fresh ideas to deepen the discipleship of those who come to your Messy Church? Look no further – our online morning of workshops is just what you need! There will also be a time of Bible reflection and prayer together as a network of Messy Church teams.

Grandparenting for faith



Becky Sedgwick's *Grandparenting for Faith* is published this month, our first new title of 2024. A member of the Parenting for Faith team, Becky shares the book's back story.

One of the most exciting things I have learned about being

a Christian is that if I am prepared to say 'yes' to God, he has adventures for me. Some are small, others larger, but every time, no matter how crazy what he's suggesting seems, I discover that he will equip me to do it, and it will be fun! God's agent in this case was Rachel Turner, founder of Parenting for Faith and author of multiple Parenting for Faith titles. In a team meeting about three years ago, she looked me in the eye and said, 'And Becky's going to write the grandparenting for faith book.' Me? But I'm not a grandparent and I've never written a book, I thought... but then I had an inkling that this was one of those God-adventures I knew I could trust.

'This was one of those God-adventures I knew I could trust.'

Simultaneously excited and terrified, and taking a deep breath, I plunged into the world of grandparenting. I knew that the core content of Parenting for Faith – God's design for children and teens' discipleship and the five key tools for parents and carers to help their kids meet and know God – would be the same. What would be different would be how that worked for grandparents. Very few are present daily in their grandchildren's lives; and there are the ever-present challenges of time, distance and family dynamics. Some grandparents are in the wonderful position of sharing their faith wholeheartedly with their children and grandchildren, but others may have to navigate different faiths or no faith, or

be faced with hostility when they try to share their views.

I started by looking at the secular research on grandparenting, and it was fascinating. Turns out that simply by having a grandparent present in their life, grandchildren are more stable and resilient. The research into the spiritual influence of grandparents was equally fascinating. Grandparents are a very important part of children's faith journeys even when their grandchildren's parents don't have faith.



We also decided to do our own research into how grandparents share their faith, and conducted a survey of Christian grandchildren, asking how their grandparents influenced their own faith. And what a wonderful picture of grandparenting we gathered! In so many instances it was stories of ordinary everyday grandparents loving well and just being themselves with God – and having an impact far beyond what they ever could have imagined. In fact, when we interviewed Christian grandparents

A lasting legacy

The team's survey of Christian grandchildren shows the incredible impact that grandparents can have. Here's a tiny but typical selection of responses.

'Just knowing my grandma was praying for me as I grew into adulthood was powerful – every card or letter was signed "Love and prayers, Grandma."'

'My nanna's faith had the biggest impact on me. She would be talking to God all the time... She wasn't judgemental or persuasive about faith but she shared how her faith was for her. She was my safe place to go when everything got hard.'

'It was everything that I am today. It made me the believer I am. Without Christian parents at the time, it was the only spiritual encouragement I had.'

about how they shared their faith with their grandchildren, most of them really didn't think they were doing anything in particular – but it turns out it's the ordinary everyday lived faith which grandchildren spot, see and consider.

'What a wonderful picture of grandparenting we gathered!'

I hope that this book will serve as a handbook for Christian grandparents, which they can look through, mark up and return to as their grandparenting – and their grandchildren – change. My prayer is that it helps grandparents see that they are part of God's plan for their grandchildren's discipleship and to give them tools and ideas and confidence to share all who God is for them with the children they love the most.

Find out more and order *Grandparenting for Faith* (£9.99) at brfonline.org.uk/grandparenting-for-faith



Praying in Wooler with Holy Habits

We're always delighted to hear from people who have found our resources helpful, so when Patrick Sheard from Wooler in Northumberland told us how the local URC morning prayer group had found Holy Habits Bible Reflections to be 'helpful and inspiring', we wanted to know more.

It turns out that Wooler URC is a small lay-led church in a small market town, but people join the online prayer group from all over the country – from Cornwall to Inverness – because at some point they had a connection with Wooler. As Patrick explains, the group began meeting during Advent 2020.

'In 2020, we thought we were coming out of lockdown in the autumn but then of course, we all went back in. As we approached Advent, we realised that whatever happened we weren't going to be able to meet together as we normally had, so we decided to meet online for morning prayers through Advent to prepare us for Christmas.'

The group met at 9.30 am, Monday to Friday for 15–20 minutes and when they got to Christmas everybody wanted to continue. 'So that's what we did,' says Patrick, 'and then, even when we finally came out of lockdown and everyone had had their vaccinations, and people were meeting in person again, the group wanted to continue with our online morning prayer.'

The pattern is similar each day, with a simple liturgy, reading, reflection and prayer. Most days some 12–14 people join in.

'Like any group on a journey, we've been through all sorts of ups and downs together, and friendships have been built and contacts made that would never have happened otherwise. We've been alongside people in bereavement and illness and it's grown into a very close

fellowship of friends. People do join from all over the country and that's a real testament to the power of the group and the place that it has in people's lives.'



How did the group discover Holy Habits?

'We used some of the Holy Habits materials in church services, prior to lockdown, and then I discovered through one of the mailings from BRF Ministries that these short Bible reflections had been published. Knowing the material was sound and good, I thought the reflections would work very well for morning prayer. They're ideal: just the right length and enough to do the subject justice without becoming repetitive.'

'They're ideal: just the right length and enough to do the subject justice without becoming repetitive.'

'One of the things that Holy Habits has revealed to me is the blessing that there is to the church from so many organisations, like BRF Ministries, producing good material. One of the biggest challenges today is knowing how best to disciple people, so to have very accessible, well-written material like this, for a small lay-led church like ours is very, very beneficial.'

Find out more about Holy Habits at holyhabs.org.uk



Looking to Lent

Our 2024 Lent book is *Loving My Neighbour*. These Lenten readings and reflections consider how to love in truth, love the vulnerable and the suffering, embrace difference, care for our world, love ourselves, and love to the very end. *Loving My Neighbour* takes us on a journey through the challenging terrain of how we can truly love one another, individually and in our communities. Edited by Olivia Warburton, it brings together the wisdom and experience of a diverse and exciting range of respected contributors: Inderjit Bhogal, Joanna Collicutt, David Gregory, Esther Kuku, Sanjee Perera, Gemma Simmonds and John Swinton.

Go to brfonline.org.uk/lent-easter to explore our whole range of Lent and Easter books, including:

- Holding Onto Hope
- At Home in Lent
- Celtic Lent
- Journeying through Lent with New Daylight

Let us know if you would like our Lent and Easter resources leaflet to distribute in your church

As a charity, we rely on fundraising and gifts in wills to deliver Anna chaplaincy, Living Faith, Messy church and Parenting for Faith. Your gift helps us impact thousands of lives each year. Please support our work.

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