

Welcome



Preparing for Easter can be as tricky as that season of Advent waiting in December, which is so easily absorbed by Christmas (now less than 300 days away, for those who are counting!) Now, still in the season of Lent, with all of its journeying in fasting and penitence, we can rush with the marketing crowd too quickly to Easter. Lent, of course, has no commercial value — it is so countercultural to stop purchasing ‘stuff’ as we seek to join Jesus in the wilderness, re-imagined as

abstinence. To the supermarkets it makes no sense at all. Rushing from Christmas to St Valentine’s Day (this year coinciding with Ash Wednesday) and on to the chocolate-fest that is the modern Easter, the secular calendar, still tagged to the Christian story in so many ways, subverts the Christian story by its addiction to consumerism.

I wonder if we might recapture the season by paying closer attention to the message that Lent tells. The life of the spirit is as important as the needs of what the Bible calls ‘the flesh’, and feeding on scripture to nourish the soul is as vital as food for the body.

Jesus says as much as he counters the Tempter’s suggestion to turn stones to bread, affirming that ‘humankind does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’, or, as Tom Wright puts it, ‘It takes more than bread to keep you alive’ (Luke 4:4).

It may be that we pay attention to this life of the spirit by reading a Lent book or attending a Lent course. It may be taking time out to pray or go on retreat. However we do so, preparing for the joy of Easter by waiting on God in Lent, and then, with the first disciples, waiting for the Spirit’s empowering at Pentecost, is important for we who follow Jesus. The transforming work of the Spirit takes place when we resist the too-early sugar-rush of Easter, and allow the soul to be reshaped, cross-like, for Jesus.

Paul Goodliff
Vice chair of trustees

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One benefice, four Messy Churches

For dads too:
the Parenting for Faith course

Death and Life – and lots of cake

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and more...

Pray with us...

In the words of Sally Welch in *Sharing the Easter Story*, our 2022 Lent book:

*Help me, dear Lord, to bear
fruits worthy of repentance.
Show me a picture of a repen-
tant life and draw me ever
closer to your heart.
Amen.*

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

The Upper Room writing competition

We’re delighted to announce that the winner of the 2023–24 *Upper Room* writing competition is Georgie Tennant (pictured right). Georgie is a part-time English teacher in a Norfolk comprehensive. She is married, with two sons, aged 15 and 13, who keep her busy. When she isn’t at work, she loves writing and contributing to her local church, leading a small group and occasionally preaching. Her first devotional book, *The God Who Sees You*, was published by Kevin Mayhew in March 2023. On hearing of her success in the competition, she replied: ‘I had to pinch myself and reread the email several times to check I hadn’t misread it. It was so encouraging to think my writing was considered a good enough standard to be included in such an amazing publication!’

Read Georgie’s entry, and those of runners-up April McIntyre and Christine Woolgar, at brfonline.org.uk/writerscomp

Find out more about *The Upper Room* at brfonline.org.uk/the-upper-room



‘[Jesus] then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.’

Hello from Julie and the fundraising team



As we approach the end of this financial year and look forward to the next one, which begins on Easter Monday, I give thanks for the generous support of our Friends, charitable trusts and foundations, those who attend our events, subscribers and everyone who has remembered BRF Ministries with a gift in their will.

It is very encouraging that so many of you have made a donation alongside your purchases of books and greetings cards. Our range of greetings cards is available to view online at brfonline.org.uk/cards, and orders can also be placed by phoning our friendly office team. Plans are already underway for the production of this year's Christmas card designs. Again, to everyone who supports us with donations and prayers, I offer our grateful thanks.

One special way to support BRF Ministries alongside the work of your own church is to purchase a BRF Ministries book and gift it for others to use. One supporter recently purchased a set of ten Bible reading notes and gave them to a church to add to 'goodie bags' gifted to a group for parents of autistic children. Perhaps you might consider similar ways of supporting BRF Ministries at the same time as supporting people in your own community.

Before Christmas we sent out over 500 fundraising packs to Messy Churches.

These packs were full of brilliant and fun ideas, and the aim was to inspire Messy Churches to fundraise for their own Messy Church and for BRF Ministries. The response has been fabulous, and if you would like a pack for your Messy Church please contact the fundraising team. This mailing was made possible thanks to a kind donation of postage stamps.

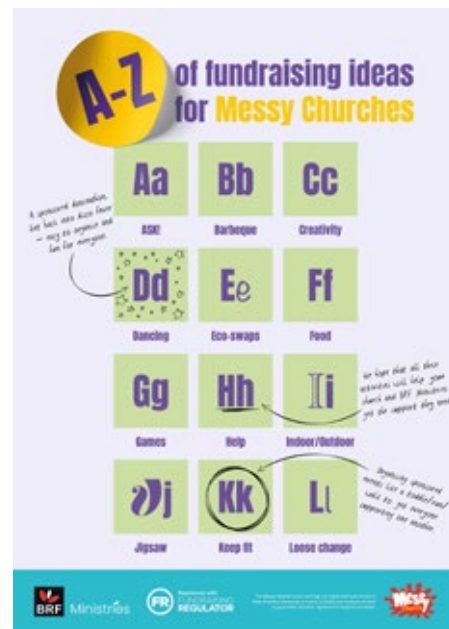
Our first major fundraising activity of the new financial year will be our 2024 annual appeal, which you'll receive with the May edition of BRF Ministries News. Please support the appeal if you can!

As always, we value your prayers for the fundraising team and all the activities we undertake to enable us to continue to deliver our remarkable ministries.

Every blessing,

Julie

**Julie MacNaughton, MCIOF (Dip)
Head of fundraising**



Easter cards

Even though Easter falls early this year, there's still time to order your cards. Our attractively priced range includes beautiful traditional and contemporary designs, with something to appeal to everyone.

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



Contact our fundraising team at giving@brf.org.uk, call us on 01235 462305 or drop us a line at the address on the back page.

Passionate about training



Training and development lead Julia Burton-Jones explains why Anna Chaplaincy is so passionate about training.

A key reason Anna Chaplaincy has generated such interest in churches is our commitment

to training those involved in ministry alongside older people as Anna Chaplains and Anna Friends. There is a strong desire to understand ageing and dementia more fully and to develop skills and confidence in reaching out to older people. Those in chaplaincy and pastoral care roles with older people are curious about the distinctive spiritual journey of later life and how to enable fruitful conversations.

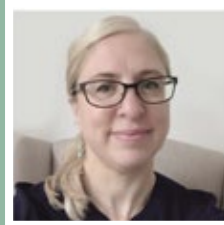
Good quality training is at the heart of Anna Chaplaincy. BRF Ministries continues to extend its offer to Anna Chaplains and their teams, responding to the needs expressed by individuals in a wide variety of contexts. In January I was invited to lead a webinar on Anna Chaplaincy and later life spirituality for Positively Rural, a Methodist Learning Network initiative. It was good to focus on the distinctive spiritual needs of older people living in sparsely populated areas of the UK.

Our training relationship with churches begins with the online Anna Chaplaincy course, delivered over six sessions, usually on Zoom, and accompanied by the *Anna Chaplaincy Handbook*. Since 2021 the course has been delivered 35 times and over 400 learners have completed it. The majority go on to be commissioned Anna Chaplains. This is a good grounding for those new to Anna Chaplaincy, reflected in comments like the following from an Autumn 2023 participant: 'Thank you so much for an inspiring and spiritual journey through this course.'

A new course which is proving popular with Anna Chaplains and others in ministry with older people is the Spiritual Care Series. This can be purchased as a bundle to be used by local churches, but is also offered over eight sessions on Zoom, facilitated by Anna Chaplaincy trainer Anne Milton-Worsell. Anne Bowers, who completed the Spiritual Care Series in 2023, told us: 'I loved being part of the group, and the course was excellent. On a personal level it has helped me see ageing in a different light. Becoming 70 was not something I wanted to think about, but now – well it's helped me see it in a totally new way, so thank you.' Anne went on to become the first Elim Anna Chaplain when she was commissioned at Beacon Elim Church in Malvern on 5 November.



The Spiritual Care Series in action



Maggie Dodd is the lead Anna Chaplain in St Albans and is concentrating on growing the network across the city in a sustainable way. Last summer, she decided that, on top of an already full workload, she would facilitate an in-person Spiritual Care Series course for a group of seven people. Why?

'Because it looked like a good meaty course and I thought it might be a good course to recommend to other people I wanted to get involved in Anna Chaplaincy.' The course ran over three months, and while it was demanding and challenging both for her as facilitator and for the seven members of the group, she would definitely recommend it.

'It was wonderful. It was a very good vehicle for discussion. The videos and the animations are really excellent: very thought-provoking. The discussions in the videos were good, too, and that obviously then encouraged us to discuss things in the group. Having John Swinton so involved in the videos gave the course

real weight and also a really strong connection back to the UK context.'

Read the full interview with Maggie at brf.org.uk/scs

Find out more about the Spiritual Care Series at annachaplaincy.org.uk



Then there were four

In rural Shropshire, it's now possible to go to Messy Church every week. Andy Ackroyd, team rector of the twelve-church Benefice of Haughmond and Wrekin, and mission enabler Di Woolridge told us how the ministry has flourished since lockdown.

When Di arrived in 2014 there were two Messy Churches in the benefice. These gradually evolved and grew, shape-shifting, closing and reopening, in response both to changing circumstances in the parishes and to Di's input, investing time in discipling and instilling key Messy Church values, including that Messy Church is Christ-centred and all-age. 'This is church,' says Di. 'It is not a means of getting people into a building!'

When Covid hit, they moved online.

Di picks up the story: 'One of the Messy Churches – which had served three villages – closed in 2021 as we really struggled to reconnect with the families after Covid, even though it had been the strongest one going into lockdown. The other one, serving four villages, which we closed in Easter 2017 and then reopened November 2017 with a new core team, grew. Even in lockdown, we had new families joining us on Zoom and online.'

Coming out of lockdown, there were too many people to meet in one place because of continuing restrictions. 'So,' explains Di, 'we looked at where our families were coming from and saw that we had three villages, basically with about ten families in each. They didn't all come every week, but we had some connection with them. So we relaunched Messy Church, post-Covid, in each of the three little churches.'

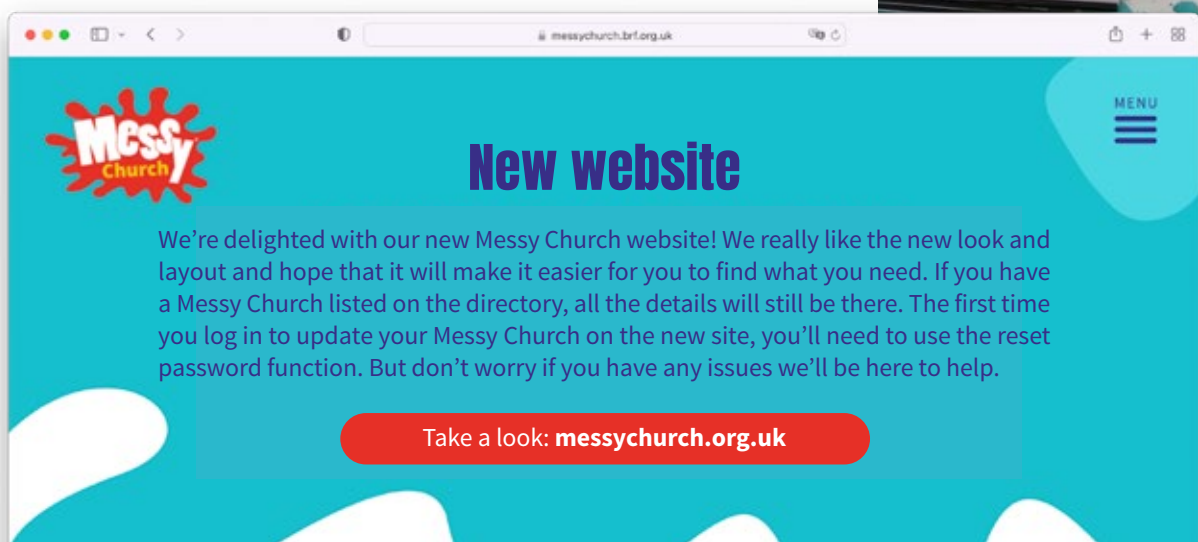
It's taken a couple of years, but there is now a group of families coming regularly to each of the three Messy Churches. They have their own core teams and, according to Di, 'they're all distinctly different, because of their makeup and the way that the core teams have developed.'



What makes the situation in the benefice even more distinctive is that, first, the new Messy Churches meet on three different Sunday mornings in the month and, second, a fourth Messy Church has now started in team rector Andy's village, and it meets on the fourth Sunday. 'So,' says Di, slightly incredulously, 'we now have a Messy Church somewhere in the benefice on every Sunday.'

'We'd talked about this happening at some point,' says Andy, 'but actually this came from some of my lay people in the church who were saying, "We need to do something different one Sunday a month. Can we do Messy Church?" So this team grew organically. They do all the preparation, all the planning; the impetus has come from them. We've been going for three months, and we've had 30 or so at each one, which is lovely. They buy into the ethos completely.'

Find out more about Messy Church at messychurch.org.uk



Unbelievably rewarding



Iain Nash has been in children's and youth work for over 20 years and is currently the children and families minister at St Michael's Church in Stoke Gifford, Bristol. He has two young sons with his wife, Lydia, and is an enthusiastic member of the Parenting for Faith speaker team. He read Rachel Turner's original *Parenting Children for a Life of Faith* book in 2011 as part of his dissertation research.

'My tutor recommended *Parenting Children for a Life of Faith*, and I was inspired by what I read.' Iain's dissertation looked at the difference between a 'God-smart' child, who has knowledge about God, and a 'God-connected' child, who has taken what they know about God and then made a heart response.

But, says Iain, the impact of Rachel's book wasn't merely academic: 'It spoke to me personally, because I grew up as a God-smart child, but not necessarily a God-connected one. Until I read that book I hadn't realised that children from their earliest days can, absolutely, have a connection with God. It's no exaggeration to say that Parenting for Faith has informed my practice ever since.'

Iain's links with Parenting for Faith developed over the years, through 'more and more research and buying more and more books', until eventually he went to one of the regular Forge conferences for children's, youth and family workers and met the team face to face. From there the links grew ever stronger until Iain joined the speaker team – alongside, and dovetailing perfectly with his day job at St Michael's. The work has its challenges but for Iain it's deeply rewarding:

'The biggest reward is having the privilege of being the champion and cheerleader for the children and their parents and carers as they journey together in the Christian faith. Whether that's training in other churches or working with my own leaders here,

whether it's teaching or simply accompanying children and families or running the Parenting for Faith course itself: it's unbelievably rewarding.'

So why, if the work is as effective and rewarding as Iain finds it, are men so under-represented in this area?

'I'm glad you asked that! I guess that historically many men haven't been as involved with their children, both in terms of parenting and faith, but I do think the tide has turned or is at least turning. I'm blessed here in St. Michael's in that I do have a number of male leaders and volunteers in my children's ministry, and I am a huge champion for that. Children need positive male role models, and I want to encourage more and more men to realise that they have a vital role in helping their children to become God-connected.'

For more information about all that Parenting for Faith has to offer, including the occasional special session for dads, go to parentingforfaith.org



The parenting for Faith podcast
season 9

Podcast: season 9 starts in April

The ever-popular Parenting for Faith podcast is back for its ninth season after Easter. Each episode will celebrate the uniqueness of different children, teens and families and how we can help everyone grow their connection with God.

Subscribe or follow wherever you get your podcasts or at parentingforfaith.org/podcast

Farewell to Jay and Olivia

BRF Ministries has said a fond farewell to two members of the senior management team: Olivia Warburton, head of content creation, and Jay Elliott, head of finance and operations.

Olivia joined BRF Ministries on 1 February 2011. An editor by background, Olivia oversaw editorial, design, print production and media production for the organisation and commissioned resources across our different ministry areas. As Living Faith lead, she has built lasting relationships with our valued authors and introduced many new writers to our list. As she leaves, Olivia has happy memories:

'I've learned so much in my time at BRF Ministries, alongside some great people! It's been a privilege heading up the content creation team, being part of BRF's senior team and developing our Living Faith ministry, working with authors and editors to produce resources that so many people have benefited from over the years. There are lots of highlights, but it's always special receiving feedback from Bible notes readers who have taken the time to share their appreciation of a particular reflection or series.'

Jay joined the charity in 2017. A chartered accountant and MBA graduate, her aim has always been to ensure the resources of BRF Ministries are used efficiently and effectively to make the biggest impact in realising our mission. As Jay moves on to a senior role with another charity, she says:

'It's been wonderful working for BRF Ministries for the past six-and-a-half years. A highlight has to be the centenary service at Dorchester Abbey, celebrating 100 years of this ministry. But what will stay with me is the privilege of being able to pray as a team each day at 2.00 pm.'



Olivia Warburton



Jay Elliott

Death and Life



Joanna Collicutt shares the story behind her latest project for BRF Ministries

In 2003 my mother suffered a serious heart attack and at one point was given 48 hours to live.

As is so often the case with older people, her 'death trajectory' turned out to be more complicated: she lived another seven years. She spent those years well, regularly visiting churches to pray privately and prepare herself spiritually for the end of her earthly life.

Whether by choice or not, she did this alone and unsupported. When I shared this with a senior church leader, he reflected, 'It's a great shame that the churches don't do more to help people with this important task!' The germ of an idea had been planted. Churches run parenting courses and marriage preparation courses; what about a death preparation course? After all, in the light of the gospel, we have something very important to say about this. Yet we don't say it often enough and, more

importantly, in ways that effectively connect with people's real questions and concerns.

Two years after my mother's death and while my father was in hospice care, I ran the first of what would be many courses across the Oxford diocese on living well at the end of life and preparing for death. It was a mix of the practical, psychological and spiritual. A lot of cake was eaten and, perhaps unexpectedly, a lot of laughter was shared.

The initiative was so successful that we obtained funding to expand it into a set of resources to support churches in approaching the subject in a variety of ways, including running courses and workshops, suggestions for Bible studies and sermons, and reflective approaches, such as meditations and prayer stations. These resources were initially local to Oxford, but in this new book and accompanying reflection cards they have been made easily available to all churches. The aim is to help them become more confident and competent

in helping people of all ages and stages of faith explore issues relating to death, engage with their own mortality, make appropriate preparations for their death, and live well in their final years, months and days.



Death and Life guide and reflection cards are sold separately

Find out more at brfonline.org.uk/death-life

'The cough in the ear'



Margaret Barnes from Earley near Reading has been a regular reader of BRF Ministries' Bible reading notes for many years. She took the time to contact us about the impact our Bible reading notes have had on her in recent, very difficult months. Her husband, Howard, has Alzheimer's and

although she has good friends nearby, they have very little family support. Margaret has times of feeling very scared about how they will manage as Howard's illness progresses.

'I was feeling quite overwhelmed, and then bang, bang, bang: three or four days in a row the readings were all about providence in old age. It just reminded me so powerfully that God is there, even when we can't see him or sense his presence.

He will provide. I couldn't miss what he was saying to me, because suddenly, out of the blue, somebody offered to help me with something I'd been worrying about. Where did that come from?'

Margaret reads both *Day by Day with God* and *New Daylight*. She turns down the corners of the pages where the readings have been particularly relevant: 'To remind myself that these things do really happen! What is often quite incredible,' she adds, 'is that a theme which speaks to me (personally or for world matters) can be repeated in the other booklet – sometimes over several days. It as if God is underlining something I need to take on board or hear.'

Margaret has a brilliant expression for those moments when God seems to speak directly to her: 'It's like a cough in the ear!' God saying, 'Ahem...'

Explore all our Bible reading notes at brfonline.org.uk/bible-reading-notes

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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