Message from Bishop Martyn

The Right Reverend Martyn Snow is Bishop of Leicester and Chair of the Central Readers’ Council.

I am delighted that this edition of The Reader is focusing on spirituality. Long ago, I was struck by Paul’s words to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:28) and the order of those words:

‘Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.’

We cannot watch over the flock unless we are watching over ourselves (and yes, this applies as much to Readers as to Bishops!). I hope you enjoy this issue.

However, I want to use this space to flag up some consultations soon to be taking place on the future of Reader ministry. In July I wrote to all Diocesan Wardens of Readers to invite them, together with between three and five others from their diocese, to come to a regional consultation event early next year. A number of us from the Central Readers’ Council have blocked out a series of days in our diaries from January to March 2018, to travel the country attending these regional events. We will be exploring a number of pressing questions:

- **Reader vocations**: given the national objective of raising clergy vocations by 50 per cent, should we have the same target for Readers?

- **Training of Readers**: given that this happens in quite different ways across dioceses, what has been helpful, and what has not been helpful?

- **Support of Readers**: again, how can we share good practice across dioceses?

- **The role of Readers**: given that there are now so many other authorised or licensed lay ministries (pioneers, children’s workers, youth workers, worship leaders etc.), how does Reader ministry fit within this ecology?

The last question is arguably the most important. For the best part of 150 years, if a lay person wanted to exercise ministry in the church, they were admitted and licensed as a Reader. Their day-to-day ministry varied enormously — some did lots of preaching, others lots of pastoral work, others lots of community work.

But all this has changed in the last ten years. Pastoral Workers now take funerals in some dioceses. Worship Leaders now lead services in many places. So what now is the need to which Reader ministry is the response (to quote someone from our last AGM)? I believe we need to articulate a very clear answer to this question if we are to see new and younger vocations to Reader ministry in the future.

So please pray for us as we undertake this series of consultation meetings. And please feel free to write in with your own views (email the CRC Secretary Andrew Walker on crcsec@btinternet.com).

The next issue of The Reader (Spring 2018) will be devoted to exploring these questions and updating you on emerging plans. And the next AGM which will take place on Saturday 21st April 2018 in Birmingham, will, we hope, mark the launch of a renewed offer to the wider church.

Martyn
Bishop of Leicester

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Welcome to THE READER

Welcome to this, the last 2017, issue of The Reader. The theme of ‘Spirituality’ was chosen before I became editor, but what a pleasure it has been to work with! I have received so many interesting ideas and articles that I am sure I could have filled the issue twice over. The variety and quality of the themed articles, almost all of which are by Readers, are an indicator of spiritual health. They also show how Reader ministry can find new and exciting ways of deepening our prayer life and awareness of the presence of God.

How many times do we hear that the Church of England is an ageing church? And yet, as Debbie Thrower shows, we can learn much from the spirituality of our elders even as we minister to them – and we want to exercise ministry in the church, they were admitted and licensed as a Reader. Their day-to-day ministry varied enormously — some did lots of preaching, others lots of pastoral work, others lots of community work.

But all this has changed in the last ten years. Pastoral Workers now take funerals in some dioceses. Worship Leaders now lead services in many places. So what now is the need to which Reader ministry is the response (to quote someone from our last AGM)? I believe we need to articulate a very clear answer to this question if we are to see new and younger vocations to Reader ministry in the future.

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Richenda Milton-Daws

The cover photograph is by Malmesbury-based photographer Robert Peel, and we are grateful to him for permission to use it. Autumn sunlight pours through the branches of the tree beside the town’s ancient Abbey (now a lively parish church) and is reflected on the wet path. So too may the love of God be reflected in our hearts and lives.
Spirituality in motion
– walking the Camino

In May 2017, Gertrud Sollars and her friend Judith walked the Camino Inglés from Ferrol on the north-western corner of Spain to Santiago de Compostela. What struck them most about the experience was the kindness of the people they met. Gertrud describes some of their encounters.

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you had asked why I wanted to go on this pilgrimage, I would have said ‘because it is there, and I like walking’. It seemed like a good idea. The writers of the guidebook warn: ‘… be wary of setting your spiritual expectations too high. Many pilgrims spend their Camino waiting for their epiphany, the life-changing moment of enlightenment that they feel is promised to them on pilgrimage, only to be disappointed when it never arrives. Every pilgrim’s experience is different.’ Quite so. Interestingly, a few weeks after our return, I came across Dave Whitson and Laura Perazzoli, The Northern Caminos, Cicerone, 2016, p.25. They describe some of their encounters.

We walked into Neda at 7 o’clock, ravenous after our first day’s walk. This was Spain – outside every restaurant ‘hora 20.00’. Our question ‘food?’ in the local bar met with a shake of the head. We sat down with two glasses of wine, and the landlady, recognising our plight, got busy. First a large bag of crisps; then a rummage in the room of which I could make out ‘protection’ and ‘buen scallop shell each and wished us a

pilgrim mass at the local church. The

hymns were sung from memory, and the hymns were

The scallop shell given to me at Fuentidueña, and good wishes on the walk. Buen Camino!

priest asked any peregrinos to come forward, and he read a prayer over us of which I could make out ‘protection’ and ‘night’, and he sprinkled us with holy water and wished us a buen camino. His verger lady stamped our pilgrim passports and gave us a scallop shell each and wished us a buen camino. We should wish each other a

Betanzos

Another pilgrim mass, this one very well attended, because it was Saturday evening. The priest began by taking a basin of holy water and a bunch of twigs and sprinkling the whole congregation, down the central aisle and up the side aisles, with obvious enthusiasm. All responses were said from memory, and the hymns were

of twigs and sprinkling the whole

with en-suite bathroom and a waiter bringing breakfast; others have to share a dormitory with thirty snoring fellow pilgrims and have to carry all their stuff on their backs.

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from A to B, but about the invitation ‘Pilgrimage is not just about getting

weeks after our return, I came across

Dave Whitson and Laura Perazzoli, The Northern Caminos, Cicerone, 2016, p.25.

Spanish it says, ‘Yo soy camino, I am the Camino!

At the end of the mass the parish

by those who could – no organ, no guitar, no accompanying at all; it sounded wonderful.

Afterwards, the peregrinos were called to the front and blessed. And then the priest added, in English, ‘When you come to Santiago and go into the Cathedral, pray also for this church. It is as if every place on the way has an invisible link forward to Santiago.

Carballeda

As we walked into the village, a small dog was waiting for us in the middle of the road. He ran to greet us, tail wagging but making no noise, and proceeded to accompany us for a good five or six kilometres. Sometimes it was ahead, sometimes behind, but always close. As the route left the road to turn right into a wood, he turned right and looked back to make sure we were following. When we stopped at a bar for a coffee, he sat in the
door, patiently waiting for us to take up our packs and move on. We were just beginning to wonder what to do about him, when a car drew up, a man got out, the dog covered in the road, the man grabbed him, snatched him over the nose and drove off with him, muttering imprecations. It was obvious that this was not the first time our little friend had tried to make it to Santiago, and probably did not have a dog with him. Either he was a seasoned peregrino, only prevented from reaching his goal by a furious owner who had to get into the car at regular intervals and pursue his pet down the Camino.

Santiago

In the Cathedral, there is a side chapel. It has all the usual furnishings of a Roman Catholic chapel – an altar, candles, a statue of the Madonna – and then it has, rather incongruously, a table and two chairs arranged opposite each other. I wondered about this when I spotted the name of the chapel, mounted on a sign on the grille.

CAPILLA DE LA MINERCORDIA

Dejaos reconciliar con Dios. ‘Chapel of mercy. Let us be reconciled with God.’ There in Santiago, and surely not just there but all along our pilgrimage.

God sits at a table with an empty chair, waiting for us to come and have a chat. However far we have made it on our quest, however many times we have tried and failed, hauled back by our own weakness or misguided desires, he is there, longing for us to join him at the table.

In many ways of course a pilgrimage is a metaphor for the rest of life. You walk with and towards a distant goal, you follow signposts and worry when you are off course. On the Camino you consult the guidebook where you are and proceed. You follow signposts and worry when you are off course. On the Camino you consult the guidebook where you are and proceed. If you get lost, you ask for directions, and if you get lost, you ask for directions.

In real life, nobody picks up

or stopping for coffee. What is

the Camino

is that, in real life, nobody picks up

Summing up

By the time we reached our destination, we had walked 185,000 steps (Judith’s app counted) and 120 kilometres (75 miles). Some of it was quite tough – two 20-mile days in a row, some long, steep hills. I was glad I had my waterproof overtrousers and my friend. Walking with Judith was a joy. We told each other our stories, talked deep and not so deep, had lots of laughs, shared insights, walked in silence. It was a very comfortable companionship, quite a gift.

Judith’s legs are rather longer than mine. When we set out, the ‘tick tics’ of our walking poles staggered. After a few days, we both noticed that we were walking (and ‘ticking’) in step with each other. Her strides had become shorter and mine longer. What an image! When we walk alongside Jesus, the longer we walk with him, the closer our pace will be to his.

the car at regular intervals and pursue

your suitcases after breakfast and drives
to it the next hotel – in my experience, you carry your load unless you find ways of sharing it with a few friends.

Maybe the hostel experience is closer to real life, but that still wouldn’t tempt me to walk the Camino using albergues. That’s like real life, too – some can afford to stay in comfortable hotels with en-suite bathroom and a waiter bringing breakfast; others have to share a dormitory with thirty snoring fellow pilgrims and have to carry all their stuff on their backs.

Reference

1 Dave Whitson and Laura Perazzoli, The Northern Caminos, Cicerone, 2016, p.25.

Surge in numbers on pilgrimage routes is welcomed, Church Times, 26 May 2017.
Developing good spiritual habits

Working in community with others, following a Rule of Life and encouraging each other in prayer and discipline, can help us to develop our life of faith. Catherine Price explains how one church draws on its monastic heritage for inspiration.

I think about the way I was brought up, my parents had fantastic family values. They gave us unconditional love, they were very kind, patient, forgiving. They had great faith in God. But does this mean that there was never a cross word in our household? Does it mean that no doors were ever slammed, no one stormed off to their room, or lost their tempers or had a hissy fit? I regret to report that the answer is ‘no’. Similarly, when my husband and I were bringing up our children, was our household always a scene of calm where everyone spoke in loving and patient tones? Again I regret to report that the answer is ‘no’. For St Paul, writing nearly 2000 years ago, the answer is ‘no’.

The Rule of Saint Benedict

O Gracious and Holy Father, give us wisdom to perceive You, diligence to seek You, patience to wait for You, eyes to behold You, a heart to meditate upon You, and a life to proclaim You, through the power of the Spirit Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

To find out more

Read more about the Community of St Adhelm at: www.malmesburyabbey.com/community-of-st-anselm

For more information about the Community of St Anselm (founded by Archbishop Justin Welby) go to: stanselm.org.uk or the Archbishop’s website at: www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php?668/an-experiment-in-monastic-life-the-community-of-st-anselm-on-their-year-in-gods-time

Colossians 3:12–17 as our foundational text. The aim of the Community is – through shared spiritual disciplines and learning – to attain more closely the ideal that Paul sets out, not just in patterns of worship and prayer but, even more crucially, in the quality of the relationships that we have with each other, with other Christians, and in the families and communities in which they live.

We decided to call the community ‘The Community of St Aldhelm’ after Malmesbury’s first abbot. One reason that we felt that Aldhelm would be a good patron for us is that he was an amazing street evangelist and church planter, and we don’t want to lose sight of the need to be outward looking and misional.

We launched on 25 May 2016, St Aldhelm’s Feast Day, so we have been going for a year now (the church where I minister) is that I think that, as human beings, we are made in the image of God. One answer to that is that I think it is the same with Christian discipleship. It is only by speaking and listening, by teaching and learning, by doing our practice every day. When we are learning to drive a car, we can get good enough to pass our tests, but it is the experience of driving, of doing 10, 20, 50, gear changes in a journey, of parking, of tackling emergency situations, that are what makes us good drivers.

From the eighth century right through to the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII, Malmesbury Abbey in North Wilts has been home to a Benedictine community. The strap-line for the church community that worshipps in the Abbey now (where I’m minister) is ‘Stability – Hospitality – Creativity’. A stable church community must be one that takes disciplship seriously. The challenge that we in the ministry team have been trying to address is how we can help each other to learn good habits of disciplship. We are not alone in this.

The Rule of St Benedict

The St Adhelm window at Malmesbury Abbey

In the autumn of 2014, Archbishop Justin came to speak to all lay and ordained ministers in our diocese. He observed then that every revival in the church has been accompanied by a renewing of the religious life. He didn’t just mean monasticism – he included the coming of Methodism under John Wesley – but any movement in which men and women commit themselves afresh to a regular pattern of prayer and Bible study. Archbishop Justin has led the way by inaugurating the Community of St Anselm at Lambeth Palace.

That led me and others to think about whether there might be value in trying to apply some of the principles of monasticism to help us grow as disciples by following a Rule of Life that would encourage good spiritual habits. We haven’t been using the Rule of Benedict in its entirety: that was developed for very different situations, and we are ordinary men and women living in families and neighbourhoods in the modern world. However, our Rule does draw to some extent on the Abbey’s monastic tradition and seek to apply its principles in a twenty-first century parish church setting.

The Community

Each member of the Community undertakes to draw up, in consultation with the Lay Prior, a personal Rule of Life giving practical application to the ideals set out below as is appropriate for his or her circumstances.

The Common Rule

Rule 1 We commit to saying Anglican Morning Prayer or some other recognised morning office daily, either in community with others or alone, wherever we are.

Rule 2 We commit to a second period of personal or shared prayer and Bible reading each day.

Rule 3 We commit to prioritising Sunday worship, and to receiving Communion if it is our custom to do so.

Rule 4 We commit to meet regularly with other members of the community to eat together and share fellowship.

Rule 5 We commit to lives of holiness, kindness and simplicity, and to make ourselves accountable to others.

Rule 6 We commit to serving God in mission with holy imagination.

Rule 7 We commit to a day of rest at least once a week, where possible.

The Personal Rules

Up to three personal rules can be added.

Rule 7

We commit to a day of rest at least once a week, where possible.

The Personal Rules

Up to three personal rules can be added.
Franciscan spirituality and its emphasis on the deeds and words of Jesus as given in the gospels. He explains why a saint who died nearly nine centuries ago has so much to offer us today.

Church life is not always simple, particularly for those who exercise a ministry, including of course Reader ministry. But there can be periods of difficulty when church life is not straightforward. Particularly at such times, I have found it helpful to belong to something that gives me a framework with structures that act as a unifying factor in my life. Being a member of the Third Order of the Society of St Francis (TSF) gives me a foundation and reminds me that God is always present.

Who was Francis?

Born in Assisi, Northern Italy, St Francis lived from 1181 or 1182 to 1226. These were challenging times for the church, and as Francis’s calling became clearer to him he realised God was asking him to give the church a new and radical vision. Not, as he had first thought, to rebuild the grandiose buildings which were in need of repair; rather something more fundamental was asked of Francis. Arguably the church finds itself in a similar position in our time as it faces well-known challenges and reducing influence. Francis emphasised poverty and simplicity in his spirituality as a way of life. Although counter-cultural, it was an approach that people found attractive and his following grew rapidly. Francis himself was a forerunner of Common Worship. There is on-going work on sustainable living and care of the environment involving livestock, a large garden, woodland, and meadow. It is a place that works hard to care for God’s creation in all that it does – an experiment from which others can learn. It is also a first example of community building and outcast and where possible make an effort to understand and help them.

Respect for creation

Francis was born and grew up in Assisi, a beautiful place in Italy where he was surrounded by spectacular natural beauty. An important part of Franciscan spirituality relates to creation and the environment. Francis had an affinity for all living creatures. One story tells how he moved a worm from a path to remove it from danger. There is also the well-known tale of the wolf of Gubbio. This wolf, we are told, was terrorising the local inhabitants, who, in return, would provide him with food. Wolf and human learned to live peacefully together. Francis knew that day on, and the animal was given an honorable burial at the end of its life. Even if we don’t necessarily believe in the literal truth of this, it is important that we respect and care for the natural world. Indeed, we are responsible for the future of the planet and its inhabitants.

Following Francis today

Twenty-first century Franciscans continue their concern for the poor and outcast and where possible make this a focus for ministry and service. There is much scope for help: prayer, financial, as well as practical. For example Franciscan groups support a mother and baby refuge, basics banks, and night shelters. Franciscan Aid works through local Franciscans across the developing world to relieve poverty and advanced education in the world’s poorest countries. Living simply can result in freeing resources for use by others.

The way of St Francis can be thought of as a way of rebellion. It is also, in a way, a call to the Third Order. For followers of Francis today’s living simply is not always easy, consumerism and a ‘you’ll deserve it’ approach to life can be insidiously tempting. However, remembering the idea of living simply can cause a person to pause and think about how they live. Luxury will not last in the long run make us any happier; it has a transitory effect, and on reflection it can seem to be simply a form of escapism.

Francis and the church

Although Francis’s vision for life was radical, it was often realised firmly rooted in the church and held priests and the sacraments in high regard. Such were Francis’s personality and conviction that from an early stage he had the support and backing of the Bishop of Assisi. His gift to the church of his day – and ours – was a vision of a new approach to the church’s calling.

Readers and other ministers today may have ideas that are contrary to those in their home churches, but the Franciscan vision was and is one of faithful and work for change from where they are, always remembering the authority and accountability under which they minister.

On occasion I have been asked to devise a specifically Franciscan act of worship, perhaps a special Evening Prayer. My reaction has always been doubtful about doing such a thing. Franciscan worship as I know it is very loosely open to any idea that is written by St Francis, but Franciscan worship for Anglicans is Anglican. Indeed in the past SSF friars have always put through the centre of devising and revising the orders of services we use in the Church of England. Some years ago Brother Tristram SSF was instrumental in the production of Celebrating Common Prayer, the forerunner of Common Worship.

The Franciscan Orders

In his lifetime Saint Francis founded and encouraged three Franciscan Orders. Not surprisingly the first of these was the First Order of Friars Minor, for men who were attracted by Francis’s vision of living simply in small communities. Friars Minor have always worked both in towns and the countryside.

The foundation of the First Order was quickly followed by the formation of the Second Order, a desire to belong to God. Each individual has an important requirement for membership of the Third Order: a desire to live by following the way of St Francis in their own way. Third Order members have ideas that are contrary to the church. The Franciscan Tradition towards the work of the Third Order. The Principles are designed to keep members aware on a daily basis of the Franciscan way. Saying them daily helps to embed them in the consciousness. Francis in living a life of prayer, service, humility and joy.

If this article has made you curious and you would like to learn more, and if you do not know a Third Order member, you can contact the Provincial Novice Guardian: Peter Dixon at Dove House, 4 New Road, Uttoxeter, ST14 7TD Tel: 01889 569722 Email: novguard@tsfostf.org.uk

Roger Healey is a Reader (LLM) in the Diocese of Winchester and a member of the Third Order of the Society of Saint Francis (TSF).
Walking the labyrinth as a spiritual practice

Labyrinths are spiritual and sacramental spaces of ancient origin, their use being closely related to the practice of pilgrimage. Jacqueline Tivers explores how they may be used as an aid to prayer and spiritual growth by churches today.

Notes and references


At Saffron Walden, turf labyrinths were cut following a campaign led by the Revd Lauren Artress, vision of the Reverend Lauren Artress, during the walk, or it may be left empty so that the whole focus is on the practice of walking, although participants should always be encouraged to pause whenever they wish to do so and to choose their own speed of progress. Many people like to stop in the centre for a period of time.

As part of my study for an MTh degree at St John's College, Nottingham, I used a portable labyrinth in my church for a week in June 2013. This labyrinth was based on the modern 'St. Paul's' design, used for the Millennium labyrinth installed at St Paul's Cathedral in London. Fifty-seven 'visits' were made to the labyrinth during the week, with twenty-two people walking the labyrinth at a special Sunday evening service and a further forty-one visiting during the week following. I placed 'activity stations' within the labyrinth and gave out information sheets to users on their arrival (see the box on the right). The latter told them that, traditionally, people have used the labyrinth as a way of releasing burdens on the way in, and then finding union with God on the way out, and that they might like to do this too, focusing on a problem or difficult situation that they wanted to bring to God. I suggested that they should pause again at the exit to thank God for what they had learnt during their walk.

At the Sunday evening service there was a great atmosphere of expectation and interest. The service was deliberately focused on the labyrinth (chairs having been moved out to accommodate it) with the period of walking taking place accompanied by reflective music and subdued lighting – all elements that would tend to emphasise the labyrinth as 'sacred space'. Everyone read the introductory notes before setting out and many people carefully followed the lines, while 'quiet, appropriate music' was played. Those who visited during the week came with a similar, focused outlook, although their experience was of smaller numbers, outside of Grace Cathedral, San Francisco in 1994, after a campaign led by Canon Lauren Artress.

Within a decade, there were thousands of sites in many types of location – churches and cathedrals, but also 'secular' places such as hospitals or schools.

In 2013, artist Mark Wallinger was commissioned to create 270 unique labyrinth artworks for London Underground; look for them in station entrance halls, on platforms or in connecting tunnels.

Modern labyrinths in ‘secular’ locations are rarely used for prayerful contemplation or walking, unlike those in church settings.

Walking the labyrinth

If you have never visited a labyrinth before, or even if you have not, there are no dead ends and there is no choice of path. You cannot get lost or make a mistake, provided you keep going forwards. Once started, you will always reach the centre. You will follow a different path from the centre to the exit, so you do not need to retrace your steps at all. There are arrows at various points on the route, so you can focus on walking rather than being concerned about directions.

There is no right or wrong way to walk a labyrinth and you are free to do whatever you wish during your walk. However, it is usually best to decide on the focus for your walk before going to the entrance. Don’t worry at all what others are doing in the way you try to concentrate on your own journey. For a lot of people, the rhythm of walking helps to focus the mind on spiritual issues, to pray, to find peace, to solve problems, to answer questions or to heal relationships. We may leave the labyrinth as changed people.

As you walk, you may appear to be little impact, so don’t worry if that is the case for you.
T he word ‘poetry’ is scary for a lot of people. It can be loaded with memories of boredom or humiliation at school as we tried to understand or recite a poem. Sometimes we try to come back to poetry in later life but don’t know quite where to start and when we do it all still seems pretty incomprehensible, too much work for too little result. There’s another word to describe a possible result of all this: ‘metaphobia’, the fear of poetry.

I remember the day I realised my life needed more poetry in it. I went to hear the poet Wendy Cope and towards the end she read a short poem called ‘Names’. It is written about her grandmother. I listened to the poems few simple lines that capture the fragile life cycle of a woman that you feel tender towards after just 107 words, and I found I was crying. All you preachers out there, remember we need to do extraordinary things with just 107 words. We don’t always need 10 minutes or points.

Not all poems make you cry of course, spellbinding language. I think it’s that moment when you focus on what it is we are not talking about… some way of crafting words that distils our experience into what feels like a purer truth. This is, I think, what the Irish poet Michael Longley meant when he was asked ‘where does all your poetry come from?’ and he replied, ‘if I knew where poems came from, I’d go and live there.’ I called my recent book The Splash of Words because a good poem is like a pebble thrown into a lake. There is the immediate splash (like the effect in me when I had finished hearing ‘Names’), and then the effect of the poem begins, the ripples set out towards you shore and they begin to lap over the shores of your understanding, shifting sands, unsettling hard stones.

We are living at a time when language is being abused. It is being hijacked for rhetoric, as ammunition, for division. For a person of faith, language matters. Whereas we can get very obsessed in our faith communities about being relevant, it seems to me that what we should be striving for is not relevance so much as resonance. Thinking through the difference between the two is an important task. Language is to be truthful.

But let’s just go back to the problem of poetry for a moment because how do you now you might be feeling, ‘OK I can see where this is going but I’m still stuck on the poetry thing. I don’t get it.’ That’s how you’re thinking then let me take you for a trip that I mention in the book – a trip to Belgium. Consider the way you’d be thinking if you were planning a trip to Belgium. You might try to learn a few useful phrases, or read a bit of Belgian history, or thumb through a guidebook in search of information as about formation, a patch of museums, restaurants, flea markets. You might try to learn a few useful words if you were planning a trip to Belgium. Now, when we try to come back to poetry in later life, for a person of faith, language to the vocation as a language is sought to praise the mystery and reality of God. When human beings fall in love we look for a language that will express what we feel and we will go to every length to describe the loved one; we all become possessed by poetry, trying to do justice to the reality of who we are in relation to them. We take that to the gym to do a workout and get fitter for use in the language of the lover, the language of love. And that, simply, is why it must be the language of the Church, the language of faith. When you talk about love, truth is far too important to be literalistic with. For this reason, fundamentalism is to Christianity what painting-by-numbers is to art. The Christian gospels are not obviously poetic until you study them closely. You then see the artistry of each of the four writers, or evangelists, as well as Jesus himself. It was poetic, profound poetry for a moment because by its very nature poetry is not set out to answer our questions so much as questions, to make us ask them. Storytelling reveals meaning without defining it. Poetry, as the splash took place, he said ‘if you have the ears to hear, then hear’. Might that be, ‘have you tuned in to life?’ This is not the news, you see. This is the Good News – and language has gone into a state of emergency to help us get to the kingdom. I believe that God has given everyone a gift. It is your being. And we are all asked to give a gift back in return – our becoming a language that enshrines the heart, the mind, the humane and our understanding of the divine. When we approach God, it is time for being poetic.

Poems are not allencompassingly and are used in such a variety of places and times: from work to help rehabilitate you, to inspiring you to give voice to unspoken grief at a funeral, from helping children see their world better to stirring up adults to protest for freedom. But the poetry thing is not about finding back what you’ve lost, but the cause of our wonder? To walk around long enough maybe it’ll re-make you, via some difficulty. What does God not want us to stay like that? No matter how much you prepared for a trip to Belgium you know that at some point you’re going to be confused and the thing about going on holiday is that it is going to be confusing part of the fun, part of the exhilaration of the break. Poetry is the same. You will be confused. This language is not but as we know. And you are allowed not to always like it! Here is the spiritual point: difficulty can be important in a life. Look back at your life so far and you probably can see that the most important times were the difficult ones. As in life, so in the language of life. The greatness of a poem doesn’t lie in our understanding of it but in its understanding of us. It arrives in our intellect by way of the heart, as R T S maugham said, just like a sense memory.

If I said to you now, ‘Here is the News’, you’d probably sit up and expect to hear the facts of the day. events that have occurred and some commentary on them. But if instead I said ‘Once upon a time’ you’d probably be equally expectant for truth but you’d tune in differently and be ready to receive it in a different form, story, where meaning is communicated without summarising it. Now, when you walk into a church or a place of worship how do you tune in your ears? Have you got your earphones on? Have you walked into a Google temple of facts on tap? Or, have you walked into a poem? Have you walked into a space that is celebrating the fact that God is not the object of our knowledge but the cause of our wonder? To walk in with expectations of the one and to get the other might mean you miss something very important. It might even mean you think the whole thing implausible. Category errors like image and cause a lot of frustration in the brain and heart.

Certainly in a Christian service you have walked into poetry in motion. You stand and sing a poem, called a hymn or worship song, then you’ll hear an ancient poem called a psalm. Prayers full of images and metaphor, stories and phrases and even at a high church ceremony, areas of the service that are not about the story of Jesus Navin made it into the vocative as a language is sought to praise the mystery and reality of God. When human beings fall in love we look for a language that will express what we feel and we will go to every length to describe the loved one; we all become possessed by poetry, trying to do justice to the reality of who we are in relation to them. We take that to the gym to do a workout and get fitter for use in the language of the lover, the language of love. And that, simply, is why it must be the language of the Church, the language of faith. When you talk about love, truth is far too important to be literalistic with. For this reason, fundamentalism is to Christianity what painting-by-numbers is to art.

The Christian gospels are not obviously poetic until you study them closely. You then see the artistry of each of the four writers, or evangelists, as well as Jesus himself. It was poetic, profound poetry for a moment because by its very nature poetry is not set out to answer our questions so much as questions, to make us ask them. Storytelling reveals meaning without defining it. Poetry, as the splash took place, he said ‘if you have the ears to hear, then hear’. Might that be, ‘have you tuned in to life?’ This is not the news, you see. This is the Good News – and language has gone into a state of emergency to help us get to the kingdom. I believe that God has given everyone a gift. It is your being. And we are all asked to give a gift back in return – our becoming a language that enshrines the heart, the mind, the humane and our understanding of the divine. When we approach God, it is time for being poetic.

Poems are not allencompassingly and are used in such a variety of places and times: from work to help rehabilitate you, to inspiring you to give voice to unspoken grief at a funeral, from helping children see their world better to stirring up adults to protest for freedom. But the poetry thing is not about finding back what you’ve lost, but the cause of our wonder? To walk around long enough maybe it’ll re-make you, via some difficulty. What does God not want us to stay like that? No matter how much you prepared for a trip to Belgium you know that at some point you’re going to be confused and the thing about going on holiday is that it is confusing Why is it that God is like a person hiding in the dark who gives himself away. Poetry is where I hear the cough, where my own snoring through life is interrupted, where the splash of words freshens and puzzles, just like those words ‘follow me’ still do. Writing The Splash of Words was my way of trying to celebrate the truth that God is so hard to come to believe very deeply: that God is in this world as poetry is in the poem.

Mark Oakley is Canon Chancellor of St Paul’s Cathedral, former director of the Paul’s Cathedral Project and author of The Splash of Words: Believing in Poetry is published by Canterbury Press. You can see a review of the book in the Spring 2017 issue of The Reader.
Spirituility in later life

Former broadcaster Debbie Thrower writes about her fulfilling ministry with older people.

THEME

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hat do you give someone for their

hundredth birthday? Nora’s family presented her with a velvet cushion embroidered with the words ‘Aged to perfection.’ I asked Norah, once a midwife, how she felt as her landmark birthday approached, ‘Deceptively.’ Despite that, and proud of her cushion (sent early) she added, ‘It’s an opportunity for the children to see an antiques show.’

That opportunity is becoming less rare. The number of centenarians living in Britain rose by 73 per cent to 13,350 between 2002 and 2012. No one’s in any doubt that we are a rapidly ageing population. That opportunity is becoming less

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THEME

getting seriously old is not particularly the case at 90, seriously old. And the process of growing up into Christ. Living with some love and for the potential it offers for spiritual growth and development. ‘I prepared a Reader (LLM) training form with Him, with different people to grow old boldly

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THEME

not only the oldest Englishman but possibly the oldest man in the UK.’ Said you either choose to see that all will be well, or you choose to think that that’s the end of me. Perhaps there are some questions of life and death which our minds can’t grasp at all, and it’s whether we face that immense change, whatever it might be, with confidence or with dread. That is the big question.

As churches, we need to improve our skills at helping people navigate the big existential questions, to boost knowledge and confidence within our communities in addressing people’s spiritual needs which becomes more pressing towards the end of our lives. Loneliness in the UK is endemic:

• 3.1% or 360,000 older people (65 and over) have not had a conversation with friends or family for over a week.
• 8.5% or 975,000 older people (65 and over) often or always feel lonely.

The Gift of Years programme provides a real resource for churches working to meet this need. As well as the Anna Chaplains, increasing numbers of lay people are coming forward as volunteers. These Anna Friends are also being commissioned: eighteen at the last count to work with Kent’s Anna Chaplains, and after Chichester’s summer launch as many as thirty people had volunteered to offer their time and talents.

Newcastle has an Anna Chaplaincy Task Group auditing what already exists and planning for more ministry among older people. The Gift of Years Rugby is working within the towns care homes, ecumenically.

The Gift of Years network of Anna Chaplains (and others in equivalent roles) held its first annual gathering in 2015, when even if so people present from a wide spectrum of denominations. Last year there were more than thirty from all over the country, and this autumn more than sixty of us will gather at High Leigh, Hertfordshire.

It’s a gracious offering from a local church, can help us think about the spiritual needs of older people and just from churches. Care home providers are increasingly developing spiritual care plans; Anna Chaplains can help us advise on these, as well as offering support to individual residents and their families. Churches that do not yet have a strategy for meeting the spiritual needs of older people can find advice, ideas and resources through The Gift of Years, and other organisations such as Christians on Ageing, Faith in Later Life, and Scotland’s Faith in Older People.

Anna Friend, Kate Dando, described what a difference Anna Chaplaincy has made to her: ‘Meeting with Anna Chaplains has helped me to voice my faith. I now have a confidence that previously, even during my working life, I did not have. I am grateful to them for showing me the way to use the skills that I now have in what I see as my vocation with older people, despite being quite old myself!’

Reflecting on her own spiritual journey, she said: ‘I think looking back that I have been growing towards God all my life. I’d thought that there were special rules and things I must know or do, but now I know that nothing matters except the relationship people form with Him, with different people doing it in different ways.’

Debbie Thrower is a Reader (LLM) in the Diocese of Winchester, an Anna Chaplain, and Team Leader of ‘The Gift of Years’.  

Collcutt, J. Thinking of You: A resource for the spiritual care of people with dementia, BRF

Nash, W., Nash, P. and Thrower, D. Come Let Us Age! An invitation to grow old boldly, BRF

The Gift of Years launched in 2014. Visit www.thegiftofyears.org.uk for more information and to subscribe to monthly newsletters.

New from BRF is Messy Vintage, Messy Church for older people, a mission-aware booklet

www.messychurch.org.uk/messyvintage
www.christiansonageing.org.uk
www.faithinolderpeople.org.uk
A feast indeed – the Festival of Preaching

Kirsty Anderson reports on a hugely successful event.

On the evening of Tuesday 12th September, I left Christ Church Oxford with heartburn. The least important part of it was due to a damp ham sandwich hastily swallowed on the park and ride bus. My mind, heart and soul were on fire with fresh insights and ideas. It had been no so much a festival of preaching as a feast; a three-day feast at which the food got richer and more plentiful as it went along.

The brain-child of the Revd Christine Smith, Publishing Director of Hymns Ancient and Modern (the parent body for SCM, Canterbury Press), the Festival had been two years in the planning. Christine told me, “When I was ordained in 2015, I took myself off to the Festival of Homiletics in the USA. I came home convinced that we should do something similar here. And how right she was. The fact that the festival was a sell-out, with almost 500 in attendance, from all over Britain, a party from southern Ireland, not to mention intrepid travellers from Canada and New Zealand, clearly indicates the hunger felt amongst preachers in this country and beyond for homiletics teaching.

Quite apart from the spectacular and enduring beauty of Oxford, what had drawn so many was the stellar line-up of speakers, any one of whom might well have been the keynote speaker at a more usual event. On Monday morning, we were offered Bishop Stephen Cottrell: The craft of preaching. This was followed by Nadia Bolz Weber (founding Pastor of an emergent church in Denver Colorado): A week in the life of a neoortic preacher. In the afternoon, you had to choose between hearing Jessica Martin: Language that makes you feel; language that makes you think or Sam Wells: Good to great: turning a decent sermon into a wonderful one. Next there followed a choice between Sandra Millar: Preaching to mark life events or Doug Gay: What’s a nice preacher like you doing in a text like this? After dinner came Paula Gooder: Nasty surprises in the lectionary. Tuesday morning saw us back in St Aldate’s, opposite Christ Church’s Tom Gate, to hear Mark Oakley: Preaching as a fountain – the sacrament of language, followed by Martyn Percy: Restoration and renewal – recovering the reading and practice of heaping miracles in the gospels. After lunch came the almost impossible decision: Padraig O’Tuama (from the Corrymeela community) Story preaching, or Kate Bruce: Preaching with imagination. After that, the choice was between Joanna Collicutt: Nurturing the preacher’s soul, or Malcolm Gault: Preaching parables and poetry. And that was just the formal sessions.

Beginning with choral evensong in Christ Church cathedral on Sunday evening, we were also treated to short homilies by many of the guest speakers, at morning and evening worship. This meant that, if you attended all the acts of worship, you had heard no less than eight first-class homilies in just over fifty hours.

Sam Wells spoke at morning worship on the first day, looking at Isaiah 43: 1-7 which was as a congregation read out being divided into separate waves of the chiasmus, back and forth across the length of the church. His message was a simple exposition moving to the centre arrowhead – you are precious, honoured and loved – and he showed how Jesus’ baptism was a physical enactment of the Isaiah text.

Morning worship on the second day contained three meditations on Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene by Nadia Bolz Weber, Doug Gay and Padraig O’Tuama, which was a remarkable demonstration of the use of different voices for contrasting effect.

I have not sufficient space here to try to give a précis of the contents of any of the talks, but the organisers plan to issue them as MP3 files that can be bought and listened to at your leisure. What I can give you here is some of the reaction amongst the audience that I picked up as I went along. Stephen Cottrell’s vastly entertaining and energetic talk on the craft of preaching, with its emphasis on a strong delivery, left some of the many women present feeling slightly brow-beaten. But many more preachers left Sam Wells’ talk on planning and preparation cut to the heart, for they had been well and truly taken to task for not spending enough time on their sermons. Despite what Wells had just told us about the necessity of a fully planned and printed sermon, he was astonishingly articulate, when the questions started and he delivered, in summary form, two miniature funeral orations on the spur of the moment. It was a masterclass in how he imaginatively found his way into the big themes behind the text.

Martyn Percy (Dean of Christ Church and our host for the festival), who many had expected would be dry and academic, came as a revelation. I overheard someone afterwards murmur to their neighbour ‘Martyn Percy is a prophet.’ I suspect that one or two naive souls had come to the festival hoping to receive a cut and dried formula which would help them deliver a great sermon every time. Instead, they were presented with a plethora of hints and tips, some of which were daily contradictory. For example, Sam Wells was adamant that self-disclosure in the pulpit is self-indulgence and should be avoided at all cost. Later that night, I heard a moving address in Christ Church from Mark Oakley which proved how well a personal story can serve the Word if delivered with humility and deep sincerity. Other questions that we debated amongst ourselves included: Does a sermon have to be entertaining? And what does entertainment mean in the context of a sermon? Should you tell jokes, or confine yourself to amusing stories?

I was interested to note that all the major talks and homilies were delivered from a printed script, though you may be sure that the speakers did not spend the whole time with their heads down mumbling towards their shoes. This meant that all the talks (that I heard) were very much in the classic form. It would be interesting, for future events, if at least one or two of the invited speakers came from more informal traditions, and especially if they were to include a brilliant exponent of PowerPoint use. Modern technology, in my experience, is so often used in an amateur way in churches. It would be supremely useful to have a demonstration of how it can be made to truly serve the Word.

Such was the success of this event that another one is already being planned for two years’ time. I wonder if they will use the same venues again? Christ Church is of course an iconic Oxford building with almost a thousand years of worship history, but its size, shape and acoustics are not designed for the reception of a talk to 450 people. St Aldate’s church, used as the main lecture space, was similarly just a little too small. But this is probably because the organisers had been surprised by the overwhelming demand for tickets for this first venture. I am already keenly anticipating the announcement of the speakers list for 8–10th September 2019.

To find out more

Two of the sessions (Bishop Stephen Cottrell and Sam Wells) were filmed and are available to watch on the festival website:

festivalofpreaching@hymnsm.co.uk

MP3 audio files of other talks are also available to purchase from this site.

Bishop Stephen Cottrell: “If they ain’t heard it, then you ain’t said it.”

Festival Director Christine Smith and the Very Revd Professor Martyn Percy.

Nadia Bolz-Weber: “One touching personal trait does not a sermon maker mean.”

Rev’d Sam Wells: “What do you mean, you don’t have time to prepare?”

Storyteller, poet and peacemaker, Padraig O’Tuama.

Kirsty Anderson is a Reader in the Diocese of Southwark, and a member of The Reader Editorial Committee.

Kate Bruce: “Bring your descriptions to life using verbs, not adjectives!”

Bright words from Malcolm Gault.

Kirsty Anderson reports on a hugely successful event.

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This article by historian and Reader Alan Wakely is the third of a series of four about the First World War that we are pleased to publish during the years that mark its centenary.

Mud, mud, glorious mud

The title of this article, coming as it does from a Flanders and Swann comic song of the 1950s, supposedly performed by a lovesick hippopotamus, may seem a little too frivolous. The mud of the trenches is one of the abiding images of WWI, however, and folklore of the 1920s somehow sought to portray that mud as glorious – probably necessary to justify the whole horrible episode both to survivors and to those who had been bereaved. It must only be coincidence that the author of the song had the surname Flanders.

In the autumn of 1917 the area around Ypres in Belgium suffered particularly heavy rainfall. It was also the location of the front line of warfare at the time, and the two factors together created one enormous deadly mudbath in which combatants, already likely enough to be casualties, were trapped by their own action, also had to face the risks of death by being sucked into the mud, or contracting fatal water or rat-borne diseases. In the immediate area, the most notorious conflict of 1914–1918, Flanders in the autumn of 1917 was perhaps the worst place to be.

Military historians refer to the battles that autumn as the second and third Battles of Ypres, but they will be forever remembered in common parlance as the Passchendaele – the very name of which has become synonymous with mud. At least, it has to people living in countries that were on the allied side in WWI. To Germans and their WW1 allies, the war was far from glorious – the very name of which has become synonymous with mud. At least, it has to people living in countries that were on the allied side in WWI.

The two villages of Passchendaele and Langemarck are both north of Ypres and only about three miles apart. The name remembered by each opposing side is not the place where the men were billeted, but rather the village they were attempting to take. Nowadays, they are peaceful country places, really rather unremarkable. Of course there is nothing of any real antiquity because both were totally destroyed in WW1, and were rebuilt subsequently when good materials were in short supply. They do, however, have really important military cemeteries, and anyone visiting sites associated with the First World War should ensure that they visit both.

If I am conducting a tour of the area, I usually go to Paschendaele first. In the immediate area there are two cemeteries under Commonwealth War Graves Commission control. One, called New Paschendaele, has some 2100 graves that date mostly from the last phase of the First War. The other, known as Tyne Cot, is the largest war grave cemetery from any conflict anywhere in the world, which fact alone reflects the phenomenally high loss of life in the district, although the lists of names of the missing on the Menin Gate in Ypres have to be taken in addition. There are nearly 12,000 graves at Tyne Cot, a memorial to roughly 35,000 more with no known grave. There are then just under a further 55,000 names on the Menin Gate. These figures actually reflect all short of the total casualty numbers on the Somme – but those who died in Flanders were killed in a much more concentrated area, and in some ways under worse conditions.

As with nearly all the British and Allied cemeteries, apart from the very smallest, there is a memorial cross at Tyne Cot bearing the words ‘Our Glorious Dead’. Leaving aside questions of the justification for WW1, there is a kind of solemn splendour to the cemetery. The number of graves is so huge that it is possible to imagine some kind of ghostly troopment of the colour, with the serried ranks of white headstones, quarried in Portland, replacing the living soldiers we can picture so well from the ceremony on Horse Guards’ Parade.

The idea of ‘glorious mud’ is completely absent from the corresponding German cemetery at Langemarck (also spell Langenmark). Unlike the cemeteries around Passchendaele, this one is in the middle of the village, and is the final resting place of over 44,000 German combatants. This, of course, far more than the number of allied soldiers at Tyne Cot, but the Germans had fewer grave sites in this part of Belgium. Furthermore, as the defeated side, they could not afford the luxury of Portland stone (or its German equivalent). Each grave marker is about eighteen inches square and placed horizontally on the ground. The vast majority indicate multiple burials, as of many as a dozen casualties. So terms of area Tyne Cot and Langemarck are not really very different.

But the atmosphere at Langemarck is in no way sentimental. This cemetery was planted with rows of oak trees that with the passage of years are now fully mature, casting peaceful shadows across the graves. It cannot be coincidental that the French word for shadow – ombre – and the word sombre are so similar. However, the striking feature is the presence of four anonymous bronze figures, seemingly keeping constant vigil from the shadow of one of these oaks near the hedge. These sculptures date from the mid-1950s, when the cemetery was re-organised by the then West German government authorities once the nation was beginning to recover economically from the Nazi era. Rather incommensurately, the sculptor was a refugee named Emil Kriger, whose surname means fighter or even warmonger. It is said, though I cannot authenticate this, that all three of the combatant nations of the Battle of Passchendaele with the extra one symbolising a peacemaker. Such a view would only have been acceptable in the 1920s, but acceptable by the 1950s, and is entirely in keeping with the profound effect the statues have on most visitors. Anyone visiting the area should make absolutely certain they visit Langemarck as well as any British cemeteries on their itinerary, because it is the atmosphere of Langemarck that epitomises the futility of war, and the equality that is found in death.

Although it has been very little more than a matter of convenience at the time these cemeteries were established, it is worth noting that each of them have a few graves of soldiers that were from the enemy of the time. Now, a century later, when (Brexit notwithstanding!) Germans are our friends and allies, this seems almost to have been prophetic.

The enemy graves are treated with every bit as much respect as those of the ‘home’ soldiers. Despite all I have said above about the cemeteries, the Menin Gate in Ypres can hardly be ignored. It is the Passchendaele equivalent of the Somme Memorial at Thiepval about which I wrote in my first article on WW1. The Menin Gate is smaller, but this is a relative term. Thiepval is gigantic, whereas the Menin Gate is merely huge. The best-known fact about the Menin Gate is that there is a ceremony there every evening at which the Last Post is sounded in memory of the fallen of the Ypres Salient, including those who died at Passchendaele. This is a very moving event. Unsurprisingly, it did not take place during the German occupation of the Second World War, but it re-started on the very evening that the centre of Ypres was liberated, with the sound of Nazi gunfire still audible in the surrounding district.

Perhaps it is judicious to compare the Menin Gate with Thiepval, but for me, the peace of the Somme, where the silence is broken only by the wind in the trees, means much more than the militarism of the daily ceremony in Ypres, even though the traffic of the town is brought to a halt every evening. Similarly, I am a little uneasy about the militarism displayed by most museums in the Ypres/Paschendaele/Langemarck area. The official one at the Cloth Hall in Ypres is good, dealing properly though largely unemotionally with the facts of the battles that took place in the area. However, I cannot imagine it including the intensely moving and indeed rather explicit love-letter on display at Peronne on the Somme, written by a young wife to her husband at the front, whom she never saw again. The Belgians somehow seem to want to imprison the war from such personal tragedies.

Another good museum near Ypres is the Zonnebeke Chateau, which concentrates specifically on the three battles of Passchendaele, and which for me presents the facts in a more sensitive way than the rather severely prosaic style to be found at Ypres Cloth Hall. Be warned, however, about the surprisingly large number of other small local museums, the proliferation of which the authorities seem never to have tried to control. Most are privately owned, and simply display various rusting artefacts and mummies that have been dug up in the surrounding fields. For me, the entrance fee is wasted, and frankly I find the commercialism of death whether by bullet or suffocation in mud to be distasteful.

However, it also illustrates the fact that human remains continue to be unearthed as fields throughout the battlefields are ploughed each year. These are all treated with the utmost respect, and whenever a whole body can be identified, a military funeral takes place. Doubtless in 2117 – a further century onwards in human history – the same thing will happen in fields outside Mosul, Aleppo or Raqqa. When will we ever learn? Lord, forgive.
The money taboo

Why are we so reluctant to talk about money in church? Has it been about an English thing. It's certainly not a Jesus thing – lots of the parables deal with money. John Sherlock reflects on a ‘difficult’ subject.

I’ve recently been given the title ‘Generous Giving Adviser’ in the Diocese of Chichester. Perhaps they should recruit a ‘Right-handed Giving Adviser’ to work alongside me! Whether or not they do, I shall certainly be spending more time in pulpit up and down the diocese, dealing with the thorny topic of money – even though generosity can take other forms.

Here are some of the things I’ve already learned (my thanks to those who have taught me these valuable lessons!)

1. Faith communities are very generous

Across the whole Church of England, PCGs give away to charity at least as much as the BBC’s Children in Need campaign. In our patch, generous people support their local churches to the tune of £1000 per week per congregation – not to mention the special appeals, grants and legacy funds that also flow in. For larger churches, the total given can be several thousand pounds each week. The amount of volunteer time given is also staggering. All of this shows the underlying generosity of the people of God.

2. Vision begets provision

I learned this phrase from a retired bishop, although he assured me he hadn’t invented it! But it conveys the simple truth that visionary thinking is a powerful motivator. It’s certainly more motivating than talking about the resources God has given you – particularly when church ministry seemed to be in some danger of disappearing across the country – in all denominations. It’s sad to see flourishing communities struggling.

There seem to be four ‘valves’ that need to be opened wider for generous giving to flow and be part of the DNA of a church. All four valves are – to some extent – available to be opened by appropriate human intervention:

Valve 1: engagement. The church needs to engage a reasonable proportion of the local community. You can’t place the burden of financial support upon a tiny minority. In rural communities, there is often a sense of ‘ownership’ of a church building which extends beyond the crowd of regular churchgoers. This may be less true in suburban and urban communities.

Whatever form engagement takes, the bigger the ‘pool’ of people connected with the church, the more potential supporters there are.

Valve 2: participation in financing. Planned giving has to be explained to the community, people need to talk about it. When church ministry seemed to be in danger of disappearing, the local church needed to be adequately financed by a predictable income stream, and that means planned giving. There is no magic money-tree!

Valve 3: amount of gift. A small change of amount in a regular gift makes a huge difference. One of the unexpected benefits of the Parish Giving Scheme is the inflation calculator. This is applied for givers who opted for it, the result is often an odd amount that the giver would never have thought of – people tend to think in round numbers. Upon seeing this odd amount, givers often phone up and round up.

Valve 4: efficiency. Unsuccessful but important! A local church must be seen as an organisation that collects money efficiently and spends money wisely. Tax efficiency – that is taking full advantage of Gift Aid – is part of this. PCC members are Trustees in law and a strong sense of ‘trust’ in the PCC’s efficiency is absolutely vital for generous giving by congregation members.

I have found that valves 1 and 2 offer good material for a Sunday sermon, while valves 3 and 4 are better for a PCC meeting. This is not a hard and fast rule: preaching is often best focused on the scripture readings, and the lectionary may point to a particular message that needs to be spoken from the pulpit. But the message remembered a few days later – at the kitchen table perhaps – is the one that precipitates action, so I usually offer some kind of handout to take away afterwards.

I’m confident there is adequate income in the UK to fund healthy churches. Estimates of nationwide post-tax income vary but, for the whole of the UK, £750 billion is not far off. As one vicar said to his congregation ‘I know the money is there: the trouble is it’s in your bank accounts!’

So my job, in a nutshell, is to do what I can to encourage parishes to open the valves wide as wide as they can, so the money flows freely, and then let God take over. There’s always the temptation to intervene only where results can be measured – but one quickly learns in this role that there’s a lot of activity that simply can’t be measured.

Henri Nouwen puts it this way: ‘...
Not many Readers have ten years’ experience of funeral ministry before they are licensed. Suzi Tippner found her professional life gave her rich resources to draw upon. Here, she shares some of her thoughts and insights.

Ministering to the bereaved: leading a good funeral

I was fortunate to have been brought up in a Christian family and had a faith for most of my life. I also spent some years as a churchwarden and often as a verger, so I was aware of how funeral services in church were conducted. Then I worked as a funeral director for ten years full time running a small office, generally three further years as a part-timer covering offices where required. This was not a profession I had ever thought about before I got the job. However, I took my professional funeral diploma examinations during this period, and I led some funeral services when we were unable to get a minister or civil celebrant. I have covered most tasks in the funeral business except embalming, which is a specialised profession in itself. Working in a small office I did everything from the cleaning and making coffee to arranging funerals, removing the deceased from homes and hospitals, coffining and carrying out chapel visits and conducting funerals – that is, I ran the funeral on the day and walked in front of the hearse. In this capacity I have observed a lot of funerals, both religious and humanist. I always found it an honour to do this job and to help people to cope at a difficult period in their lives. Although I would never push my faith at people at these times, they knew about it and often said that they were pleased that someone with a faith was taking care of their loved ones. Even people who professed no faith themselves said this.

As I was nearing retirement in the funeral business, I began training as a Licensed Lay Minister. Once I had been licensed, I was interested in taking funeral services as I felt that my previous working life gave me particular insights into this field of ministry. I share here some ideas that I find helpful, although I would not think of myself as an expert in this or any other area.

Beginning with the bereaved

I like to make contact with the family as soon as possible after being contacted by the funeral directors, and arrange to go and visit them. Occasionally they prefer to visit me, especially if they live a long distance away or if there are difficult family relationships and they want ‘neutral territory’ for the discussion about the service. Although this meeting is clearly all about them, their loved one and the kind of service they would like, I do like to try to sometimes give them a little bit of myself and find some connection with them. I find people usually find it easier to trust someone they have something in common with, especially if they have never met them before. This is not always helpful if they are very private people and clearly prefer not to have a conversation of this kind. It is important to listen and observe, so you can gauge what approach they take and follow suit.

Clearly it is important to find out as much as possible about the person whose funeral service I am taking, so I ask about their likes and dislikes, hobbies, lifestyle and work and their relationship with their family. This helps me to make appropriate suggestions for possible hymns and readings, and with my choosing of the prayers. There are many helpful books with ideas for prayers and I have used some from ‘Comfort and Consolation’ which is a compilation from several authors. I usually ask them to sum up the person in a few words and this often brings out the salient points of their character. And I sometimes ask, when I meet the family, if there is something really important or amusing about them that will make the people attending the service smile and think, ‘Yes, that’s him/her to a tee’. Although the funeral service is a sad occasion people do like to smile too and think fondly of their loved one.

I find it a mixed blessing to have someone from the family do the eulogy. It is great because this makes them part of the service and contributing, also a change of voice is interesting. It is a crematorium service, however, timing can be an issue. If the eulogy goes on for too long – no matter how interesting it is – it can be extremely difficult to keep within the timings for the chapel. It is really good if whoever is giving the eulogy can send it to you first. That way you can see how long it is and estimate the amount of time that will be needed, whether you are delivering it for them or they are. You know that they will bring out all the really important things in their loved one’s lives and all the details will be correct!

Another way of involving others is for them to read poems they have selected or the scripture reading.

During the service

When I am preparing the service I like to repeat the person’s name often. It is why we are there – to celebrate this particular life. This person is the central theme and for once it is all about them.

The one thing I find families feel is helpful to them during the service is to make eye contact with them as much as possible. It is almost like holding them during the service. I remember going to a funeral at a crematorium for the father of a friend, long before I was ever involved at all. I was there because I had been fond of him but mainly to support my friend. It was a very small gathering and we were all on one side of the chapel facing the coffin. The minister didn’t look at them once, and stared at the empty side the whole time. I was deeply affronted for my friend’s family and felt like pointing out where we were! I didn’t of course, but it made a clear impression on me at the time and since.

I always stand next to the coffin for the commendation and lay my hand on it. I like the feeling that I am in contact with the deceased.

Questions of choice

The choice of burial or cremation has generally been decided before I become involved. My personal feeling is that burials can be easier for the family as they take the choice to walk away when they want to rather than have the coffin taken from them at the end of the service. It is clearly a personal choice, however, and I would never initiate that discussion with the family. It is important, however, to think about when you want the coffin to be lowered by the bearers. In my career I have often been involved at a Lay Minister, two of our churches often have the coffin brought into church the evening before the day of the funeral. This is generally referred to as an ‘into church’ by the funeral director. The family may or may not attend but I really like to be there to accept the coffin into the church and say some prayers. If the family do come, then a short service is appropriate. Part of a psalm perhaps and prayers ending with a dismissal blessing. I have used ‘the four candles’ piece, and placed the candles round the coffin. The family sometimes like to stay for a while and can find this helpful. This is very common in the Roman Catholic tradition but rural Anglican churches also seem to like it.

It can be good to get used to seeing the coffin in place before the actual service and sometimes it can give the family more time to think about their loved one in a quiet setting – especially if they have not visited the coffin beforehand at the funeral directors, or perhaps live a long distance away and have only just managed to travel for the service. It does mean, however, that the music chosen to be played before the service is not used for bringing the coffin in as it is already there.

These are just a few of my own experiences in taking funeral services and I’m sure that there are many more discussions that can be had on this topic. It would be interesting to hear from other Readers who feel called to this important ministry.

Suzi Tippner is a Licensed Lay Minister (Reader) in the Upper Thames Benefice, Diocese ofBrittand, and a funeral director.

To find out more


www.churchsupport.org/funerals

www.churchengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/texts/pastoral/funeral/funeral.aspx
Revealing the light of Christ’s love

On behalf of Embrace the Middle East, Heather Stanley travels to the region to meet people affected by war, poverty and injustice, to bring their stories to Christians in the UK. Earlier this year she made her first trip to Lebanon, where she struggled to feel any hope for the future, until she met Christians who showed her a different story.

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standing in the midday heat and haze, in the city of Zahle on the floor of the Bekaa Valley, I spoke to a Christian man who organises transport for refugee children who are living in the Valley. He told me: ‘Back in 2012, when the first few families started arriving, we thought we could cope with this – it will be hard but we will cope. But then more and more people arrived; hundreds, then thousands; even then we never imagined it would become tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands. And now, it is millions.’

I didn’t know what to say to him. I could barely wrap my head around the numbers he was talking about, let alone offer any words of encouragement to help him and the team from his church to meet the huge needs they are faced with every single day. We stood together in silence, looking out across the valley to the Syrian hills, a mere 15km away. He told me on some days, when the wind comes from the west, it is possible to hear bombs exploding.

Due to its long and complex history of refugee intake, conflict and political upheaval, Lebanon no longer allows formal refugee camps to be constructed, and Syrians and Iraqis are settling all over the tiny country. In the Bekaa Valley, hundreds of thousands of refugees live in informal tented settlements where Embrace’s Christian partners provide a variety of assistance and humanitarian aid to the innumerable refugees who have made the valley their home.

I say innumerable because no one is counting. The ‘conservative estimate’ our partners use is that there are a minimum of 1.5 million Syrian refugees now living in the country. Lebanon is barely the size of Devon and Cornwall combined, and had a population of roughly 4 million before the Syrian conflict.

If the UK were to accept an equivalent number of refugees we would have seen over 25 million people settle here.

Earlier that day, I had stood on the rooftop of a school run by one of our Christian partners in Zahle. There, I spoke gently with a 12-year-old girl who had arrived from Syria a few years ago. I asked her what she remembered of her home country. She told me she remembered nothing, and that she tries not to think of Syria as that is where she saw her mother killed. It didn’t seem right to ask her if she ever wanted to go back. I knew what the answer would be. It’s unimaginable to consider what this child had seen, but then I didn’t have to imagine it because there was a little girl sat right next to me, telling me her experience, her truth.

The school she attends, run by Embrace partner, the Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development, looks after her well, but it is stretched and has to run on double shifts to enable as many children as possible to attend classes. The classrooms are underground with no natural light, and although the staff take the children outside, and the walls are decorated with bright colourful murals and art the children have made, there was no hiding it is below ground. I wondered what that must feel like to children who have escaped the conflict in Syria, remembering research conducted by an international NGO that revealed 84 per cent of adults and almost all children said that ongoing bombing and shelling was the number one cause of psychological stress in children’s daily lives.

The students sit tightly packed in their classrooms, a mixture of local Lebanese and Syrian refugees. Together they learn the Lebanese curriculum, which, while tricky for the Syrian children, will enable them to be part of the society in which they may end up living for some time to come. The chances of all getting jobs is low, and even though their education is like gold dust it is incredibly important that they have it. I can’t help but feel the weight of hopelessness when I think how Lebanon is unlikely to offer them all jobs, healthcare and higher education.

After visiting the school I walked down the road to a food distribution centre run by the same church and there I met Ahmad. He is the father and breadwinner for nine people who share a small apartment; they’ve been down the road to a food distribution centre when he can, helping people just like him and bringing comfort and hope to other refugees. Ahmad told me that he had cried tears of thanksgiving and gratitude when he received help.

Moreover, the compassionate welcome he had received from the local church was worth as much to him as the food that fed his children.

These individual stories are wonderful, but standing in the dusty courtyard watching families queue to pick up their parcels, I come back again to the scale of the problem in Lebanon, which is such that the Christians here are not anticipating any reduction in the need for their services, probably ever. It is overwhelming.

But again and again I meet Christians refusing to be hopeless. Like 77-year-old Robert, who has been running a centre for vulnerable and abused girls in a suburb of Beirut for decades.

The centre, run by the organisation Beit el Nour, which means House of Light and Hope, is a long-term Embrace partner and has been supporting vulnerable Lebanese girls for decades. They now serve an increasing number of Syrian refugee girls and young women too.

The girls are particularly at risk of missing out on their education, as they are expected to stay at home and look after younger siblings, and early marriage is prolific. There is nowhere safe to play, and the girls who spend their time selling sweets and chewing gum on street corners to bring home a little money are at risk of sexual exploitation and violence.

‘We’re stretched to the limit,’ he told me, looking tired, but determined. 'We just hope and pray the refugees can return home, because the locals will benefit, but it is not good here in this place. There is trafficking, there are arms, there is prostitution. The young are so very exposed.'

I’m invited to visit the after-school club where I meet young girls who giggle but nod when I ask if I can take their photograph. They’re proud of their schoolwork, showing me their books and some of the artwork they make at the centre.

I hear story after story of how the centre and the care and love shown by the staff have helped build girls’ self-esteem and worth. We even hear from a father who said ‘Before we used to hurry into finding a husband for our young daughters, but today we understood that we were wrong. I believe that the girls are still young and they should focus on education and activities that will help them in the future. Early marriage is a disaster! I am happy to find a place at the centre so my daughters can pursue their dreams and can accomplish something important in life.’

I ask Robert if it is the individual stories of success that keep him going. He says: ‘Yes, but more than anything else my Christian faith is at the core of my vocation. Without the support of my brothers and sisters in Christ and the presence of God in my life, I can fall into despair. I have thought of giving up. Who am I to minister to these people? ’

‘But with the Lord, I can put my burdens at the foot of the cross. He gives me the strength today, and the next, and the next to keep ministering and to continue the job he entrusted me with.’

I returned home to the UK from Lebanon hugely conflicted. The hopelessness could be overwhelming, and there is a temptation to sink into that and see nothing but futility in the work that is being done.

But then I think of Ahmad and Robert, of the girls and young women at the after-school club, of the food parcels being carefully crafted and hand-delivered, of a mural painted on a school wall and a little girl who misses her mum but gets to have an education, and I am encouraged. Little things do change lives, no matter how big the odds.

At Embrace we would love to help you keep your church involved in praying for and supporting Christians in the Middle East and all the life-changing work they are doing. We produce free church resources at Lent, Harvest and Christmas, packed with prayers, all-age talks, posters, stories about the people whom we serve, and more. We also produce a six-month prayer diary, to help support our brothers and sisters in what they call ‘the most essential support they can get’. You can call us on 01494 897950, email on info@embraceme.org or sign up for our regular e-newsletter at www.embraceme.org which will let you know whenever we launch or update our resources.

You can also see a film about Robert and the at-risk girls centre he runs in Beirut at www.youtube.com/lookembrace

Heather Stanley is Digital Communications Manager for Embrace the Middle East.
Lenten journeys

Geoff Brammall offers an alternative to the traditional Lent course.

'This isn't like a Lent course; it's too much fun!' was the reaction of one of the participants to our parish's study course in Lent this year.

In previous years our Lent groups have consisted of viewing and discussing the issues arising from the films Chocolat and The King's Speech, using the study guides written by Hilary Brand; reading Desmond Tutu's In God's Hands1 and a study of the psalms2: interesting, but nevertheless traditional Lenten fare.

An advert for an exhibition on the Dead Sea Scrolls in Chester Cathedral, Library was recently included by The Times in a list of Britain's twenty-five best small museums. It was built in 1874 as a synagogue for Sephardic Jews (from Spain and Portugal). After the synagogue ceased to function as a place of worship in 1974, it was turned into a museum, but the structure and furnishings of the synagogue still remain.

We were given a talk by a leading member of the Manchester Jewish community, Merton Paul, on the practices and rituals of Judaism, including the use and origin of prayer shawls, tefillin (phylacteries) and mezuzahs (small cases containing a parchment, fastened to the doorpost of a Jewish house), which led to an interesting discussion about being an adherent of Judaism in twenty-first century Britain.

The Dead Sea Scrolls exhibition, which had been the inspiration for the entire project, formed the second visit. Not only were we able to view the exhibition but Professor George Brooke of Manchester University, an expert on the scrolls, provided us with an illuminating introduction to the discovery of the scrolls and their contribution to the development of biblical scholarship.

We also took the opportunity to view the sculpture The Water of Life, by the contemporary artist Stephen Broadbent, in the cathedral's cloister garden. This is an interpretation of Christ's conversation with the woman at the well of Samaria, which happened to be the gospel on the Sunday after our visit (Lent 3).

Although the parish is in Chester Diocese, Manchester Cathedral is actually only a few miles away, and so the third visit consisted of a guided tour of the cathedral. Particularly striking was the modern stained glass in the west windows, as well as the triptych in Fraser Chapel by Mark Cazalet, which symbolically sets the Eucharist within the setting of present-day Manchester, complete with beer and chips! We were also shown the memorial plaque to Reverend Joshua Brookes, a member of the (then) parish church staff, who was a mentor of Jabez Clegg, the central character of Isak Dinesen's novel The Manchester Man, which number of the group participants had read.

For the fourth journey we visited Manchester Art Gallery. As no guide was available, I was given permission to organise my own tour. This necessitated a number of preparatory visits in order to seek out relevant paintings, which I then had to research before I could present my findings to the group. We eventually viewed seven paintings. A painting by the Jewish artist Sir William Rothenstein – Reading from the book of Esther – linked well with our visit to the Jewish Museum. The Dutch artist Abraham Bloemaert's The Raising of Lazarus again fitted appropriately as the incident was the gospel for the following Sunday (Lent 5). And the gallery's excellent collection of Pre-Raphaelite paintings was of particular interest to the group as our church (a Grade 2* listed building) contains many features of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, including windows by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Ford Madox Brown. In this section of the gallery Holman Hunt's Light of the World and The Hiring Shepherd, as well as John Everett Millais' Victory, O Lord provided interesting viewing and discussion.

The final excursion was a visit to St Mary's Roman Catholic Church, known as Manchester's 'Hidden Gem'. The church is famous for its Stations of the Cross commissioned by Father Denis Clinch from Royal Academician Norman Adams. The Expressionist style of the stations clashes violently with the traditional classical style of the interior of the building, but they are an attraction for visitors to the city of Manchester.

As Father Denis has now left the parish, I again prepared the talk myself. This was a valuable discipline, as it forced me to engage with the paintings to a much greater depth than I had done on previous visits to the church.

Preparing these two latter visits was my own form of Lenten discipline, from which I learnt a great deal. There is no better stimulus to interpretation than having to tell other people about a topic.

Viewed as a whole, the series of visits followed a chronological development from the history of Judaism and the Dead Sea Scrolls to Victorian art and religion, ending at the beginning of Holy Week with the Stations of the Cross in a most modern form.

We used public transport to access most of the venues, many parishioners making use of their free passes, which Manchester generously allows you to use on all forms of public transport.

The visits also fired the imagination of parishioners. They were often attended by people who had not attended the discussion groups on Tuesday evenings in Lent in previous years. Some came because the visits were in the daytime which meant they did not have to come out at night; others because there was no study or discussion element.

There was also an unplanned fellowship aspect to the visits. People who normally attended different services on a Sunday came into contact with each other; the train journeys into Manchester allowed people to have conversations and to get to know each other better, and several visits finished spontaneously with lunch in the cathedral refectories, gallery café and even the rather smart Carluccio's restaurant on Manchester's Piccadilly station, all of which allowed for further table fellowship.

As well as the joyful expression at the beginning of the article, I received many expressions of thanks from participants, either by e-mail or orally and the course was exceptionally well received. The only problem is that they want me to organise another series of visits next year!

If you are planning a Lent course for next year, why not look around your local area and see what the cultural / religious scene has to offer and plan a similar series of Lenten journeys for your parish? But take care: you might have fun!

References
1 Brand, Hilary, and the Chocolatists, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002;

Dr Geoff Brammall is a Reader in the parish of St. Martin, Low Marple, Stockport in the Diocese of Chester and would be happy to offer the tours of Manchester Art Gallery and the 'Hidden Gem' to any interested groups. He can be contacted on geoffbrammall@openworld.com
A theology of science: Participation in reconciliation

We are delighted to present an extract from Faith & Wisdom in Science by Tom McLeish.

This ground-breaking book demonstrates how the so-called ‘debate’ between science and religion has moved on. The author shows there must be an integrated theology of scientific knowledge – a theology that will help to heal the broken relationship between humanity and nature.

Through the lenses of our experience of science, on the one hand, and of the biblical theological story, on the other, we have traced how themes they both share have shaped and responded to these two deeply human endeavours. Long and linear history, the surprising human aptitude for re-imagining nature, the search for wisdom as well as knowledge, the ambiguity and experience of pain, the deliberate balance of order and chaos, the centrality of the question and the questioning mind and above all the experience of love are the lines that draw us to a larger narrative in which science can be framed.

Within all these themes the pattern of relationships has dogged us constantly. Science experiences the revelation of a new relationship between human minds and the physical world. The nature language of the Bible is constantly employed to describe and develop the relationship of care and of understanding between humans and a world that is both our home and also potentially a frightening field of bewildering complexity. Although fraught with ambiguity, experiencing pain and joy in equal measure, knowing terror before the phenomenon of chaos as well as experiencing joy before its resplendent order, bewildered by ignorance yet granted hard-won understanding, the biblical theology of nature is consistently relational.

St Paul invested to a deeply personal extent and a world that is both our home and also potentially a frightening field of bewildering complexity. Although fraught with ambiguity, experiencing pain and joy in equal measure, knowing terror before the phenomenon of chaos as well as experiencing joy before its resplendent order, bewildered by ignorance yet granted hard-won understanding, the biblical theology of nature is consistently relational. St Paul invested to a deeply personal extent and...
I’ve wanted to be a novelist since I was a very small girl – certainly the top end of primary school. Sadly, my other Wharton-style novel [sic] made it into the bestsellers list. I remember one of my teachers saying to me (when I was about ten) ‘Well Catherine, you can spend your whole life writing novels!’ I’ve been trying to prove her wrong ever since.

I grew up in a Christian home, so faith has always been part of my life. I did come a bit late to Anglicanism though (and that gives me something of an outsider’s perspective, perhaps, for a novelist). I got criticised for taking cheap shots at evangelicals – but really, I take cheap shots at everyone. And anyway, I am one, so I think I am allowed to.

When I say I am an evangelical, I was brought up a Baptist and my spiritual baptism (if you like) is still very much in scripture (rather than tradition or Eucharist). I may not like some of the trappings that are associated with being evangelical – such as a readiness to police other people. But a personal relationship with Jesus is central – and that is the heart of evangelicalism. My books don’t appeal to everyone. In fact most of the negative correspondence I get is about the language. Some of my characters swear a lot. (Not all of them do!) The language I use reflects what I see and hear around me (in church circles as well as outside them), and I do this to write a pastiche of the reality.

The ordinary dilemmas faced by ‘churchy’ and ‘non-churchy’ people alike are endlessly interesting. Locating them in a very specific, recognisable (but slightly weird) world adds an extra dimension – especially if that world is one we are aware of without being privy to the inside view. To many people the Church is just such a weird world, one they are aware of but which they don’t understand. I hope they can enjoy the books anyway.

My first three novels (Angels and

Men, The Benefits of Passion and

Love for the Lost) are not so much a trilogy as loosely connected. Characters reappear in different books. Indeed some characters reappear in the Lindchester books too, though (with the exception of Andrew Jacks) just as cameos. I don’t always know how a character is going to develop when I start writing. They evolve and I find out things about them as I write. There is a character in Angels and Witch A who is gay – but I didn’t know he was gay when I started writing. I thought I realised only slightly before my main character did. But when I asked friends who read the manuscript, they had twiggled much earlier. Writing characters reveals something to us writers about ourselves. The stuff that comes up from the subconscious is a real gift – you have to take notice of it.

Actors (the first of the Lindchester trilogy) was written as a conventional novel at first – but it just wasn’t working. So I decided to ransack the manuscript and blog it as a pastiche, a sort of modern twist on a Victorian novel. The Author has a

strong presence – indeed the narrative style rubs our noses in the fact that these people, this world, are made up. Even in a story I want to want to believe what we are reading is very realistic.

I didn’t expect a publisher to buy the book, but I hoped people would read the book and enjoy it. As events in the real world happened I thought about how my characters might react to them and added in those reactions – so that gave it a topical feel.

The second book, Unseen Things Above, was blogged from the start. I continued with the style that had already developed even though I knew more or less what was going to happen at the start. But the third one, Realms of Glory, was written much more in response to events in the outside world. I was going to base it on the restructuring of the cathedral chapter, but as 2016 unfolded that went by the board. I knew very little about what was going to happen when I started – though I knew there would be a death (even if I wasn’t entirely sure whose it would be) and I had hoped for a happy ending for at least some of the characters.

What I can do is gather up what I am hearing from other people and think about how the characters in the book would be reacting to them. I believe it as I write it. There are people who don’t see it as a novel, rather as a commentary on current events. It is particularly people who haven’t read much modern or experimental fiction who respond like this.

Realms of Glory does have some strong scenes and an awareness of death and judgement. And there is a sense of lament about the tragic passing of the Church of England – or at least as the Church as we know it now. But also, I think, holds out a sense of hope – not that everything is OK, but that in spite of the mess and complexity of our lives we can trust in the infinite, patient, sometimes ruthless, kindness of God.
The concept of a citizen’s basic income is not a new one, first mooted in the eighteenth century, but has never been put into practice. However, there now exists the Citizen’s Basic Income 2020 (CBI 2020) group and its website. People of goodwill from all walks of life are discussing the concept of giving everyone a universal basic income (or universal income) and working for the implementation of this eighteenth century, but has never been put system in the interests of social justice. I can agree with the whole idea should perhaps be worth a try. Even those who thoroughly eraticians, but this book suggests to me it would group taking a chapter at a time. Overall, the arguments for a universal basic income are demonstrating effectively that not all ‘heroes’ falling out acrimoniously with a succession of were opinionated, cantankerous, and generally pioneer in missionary work among seafarers. Whilst Ashley was certainly prepared to be regarded in some circles as an important a successful fresh expression of church based study, but is easily read although classified as a few decades. Some church members may be of daily consecutive readings from the Bible enter the lists a steady decline in their take-up in the last topic-based. IVP has now entered the lists with a new monthly series called food for the Journey of, which the two reviewed here are examples. The format follows the pattern of daily consecutive readings from various books chosen, with devotional comment from the authors based on sermons preached at: past Keswick, Gordon, and Thirroul. My aid to Bible Study is to be welcomed, I ask myself how useful these guidelines will be. They are attractively produced, but it is hard to see the 30 days they will be used again! They could be most useful to give friends to help them into a book. I sometimes feel that...
Swinton offers us profound reflections on some foundational issues of culture, disability, normality, identity, vocation – and how they are linked. I am not likely to think of any of these issues the same way as before. Running through the book is a plea to be ‘timeful’, I loved the notion that love has a speed, 3mph, it walking pace. Swinton appeals to our perception of time affects our view of disability, with special reference to dementia and acquired brain injury, the implications for Christian communities and how they view and integrate people with disabilities are far-reaching. The book finishes with a liturgy for a ‘lived funeral’, a ceremony for a person who has had a life-changing injury and wants to see themselves and their family from themselves as the injury to the person they have become afterwards. While not many readers will have the opportunity to use this, there is much in this book which has relevance for our practice as ministers.

GERTRUD SOLLARS

Helping Children and Adolescents Think About Death, Dying and Bereavement
Marian Carter
SPCK pbk £16 9781788498740

Both a theoretical and practical resource, this book is written by an experienced chaplain and bereavement worker and addresses the need for absolute honesty with the young as they are supported through all the issues around death, dying and bereavement. Each of the nine chapters follows a pattern, beginning with experience and leading to our own practical response with suggestions to implement. The first chapter looks at what death is. Subsequent ones take us through grief and factors which influence the grief process. Children and adolescents should be told, funerals, continuing care, and care of the carers. We live in a multi-cultural society, and the sections on the traditions of other world faiths are extremely helpful, as are the appendices covering a vast array of further resources. This sensitively written and challenging book will deeply enhance our own understanding and bring depth to our relationships with grieving people of any age.
LIZ PACEY

Reproducing Churches
George Lings
BRF pbk £9.99 9780857464664

George Lings is an authority on fresh expressions of church. His argument is that of the many metaphors which may be used to describe (church planting of course being one of them), reproduction is one of the most powerful and biblically supported. A church which reproduces itself does not create a point-in-time, but something new and full of life, yet linked to the original as child to parent. The book is dense, argumentative, but the author carefully has not created a point-in-time, but something new and full of life, yet linked to the original as child to parent. The book is dense, argumentative, but the author carefully

Called by God
Derek Tiddall
BRF pbk £7.99 9780857465065

I have found this book a book that covers foundational aspects of faith in a refreshing way. The book’s focus is those things to which we as Christians are called, as part of the identity in Christ and our walk of discipleship. The twelve chapters cover topics such as: called into fellowship…called to be free…to peace…to suffer…to hope. The book informs or reminds us of central truths to help anchor our life and faith, and this is well achieved. The author references the Old Testament, but as far as it is written and engages with ways in which we might struggle to know deeply, or to live out, these aspects of our calling. The author ends with helpful questions for thought and discussion. The book is accessible, thought provoking, challenging and encouraging, free from any fear rather than ‘fearful’. It is potentially of interest to both new and mature Christians, and to preachers encouraging discipleship.
LINDSAY TANNER

Reformations for Daily Prayer Advent 2017 to the Eve of Advent 2018
Carey, John, Blackith, Tim et al
SPCK pbk £8.00 9781910514900

This book contains an excellent compendium of penetrating and challenging reflections for the morning prayer lectionary readings (Monday to Saturday) for year B. The many eminent authors are all noted for their lucid writing and broadcasting.
Renewal & Reform unfolds. Read about the Church of England’s Renewal & Reform initiative? The nature and developments in a national context. Have you heard about the Church of England’s Renewal & Reform website is www.churchofengland.org/renewal-reform.aspx. From this go to ‘About R&R’ and you will find the sections below from a menu on the left hand side.

The Vision and Narrative section from ‘About R&R’ has six signs of hope. Here is the second with challenges to discuss with fellow lay ministers and members of your congregation(s).

- Churches are equipped to make and sustain disciples across all generations.

Reader Challenges
As a Reader or Reader in Training:

- What does being ‘equipped’ for ministry mean to you in spiritual and practical terms?
- How or who do you expect to be responsible for this equipping?
- Are there (or should there be) ways in which you can evaluate if you have ‘made a disciple’?
- Is the concept of ‘sustaining discipleship’ sustainable?

Resources
From the Renewal and Reform Website,
- Select the Setting God’s People Free section from ‘About R&R’ Read the essay ‘The Roots of Renewal and Reform’ by Revd Canon Jeremy Worthen. Find three short quotes or points from this related to making and sustaining disciples to stimulate discussion in your parish either through a sermon, with your PCC, in your Ministry Team or with small discussion groups.

Introducing Richard Havergal, Central Readers’ Council Treasurer

Richard Havergal obtained a BA in European Studies at the University of East Anglia and is a life member of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. He serves as Licensed Lay Minister in the benefit of North Bradley, Southwick and Heywood with Steeple Ashton in the Diocese of Salisbury.
Serving Together is part of the Renewal & Reform programme aimed at furthering the growth of the Church, and stimulating its mission. It builds upon the aims of the Lay Ministries Working Group report Setting God's People Free, which was overwhelmingly endorsed by General Synod in February 2017. On 5th June this year, more than fifty people attended a Consultation Day which marked the beginning of a year of celebrating, sharing and learning around lay ministries. The Ven Julian Hubbard, Director of the Church of England’s Ministry Division, began with an affirmation: We should be positive about what is happening in Lay Ministry now, as well as about potential for the future. Lay Ministers should be celebrated for what they are, not only for what they might become.

Key issues identified by the Serving Together team are:

- Youth ministries;
- Life events, especially funeral ministry;
- Developments in Pioneer ministry;
- The future of Reader ministry.

Proposals for three types of support and permission giving for lay ministries (in the plural) are under consideration.

These are:

- **Authorisation** (by the bishop, on the advice of diocesan staff), with local supervision but ultimate accountability to the bishop.
- **Licence** (by the bishop, but with national recognition), as with the other types of permission, responsibility for supervision and accountability lies with the local parish or deanery level in the first instance but with accountability at diocesan and ultimately national level. The diocese is responsible for training and for safeguarding checks.

The Serving Together report can be downloaded at: [www.ministrydevelopment.org.uk/serving-together](http://www.ministrydevelopment.org.uk/serving-together), along with a summary of the Consultation Day held last June.

# The Adams–Myland Fund

In the past, the Central Readers’ Council has received bequests with the aim of supporting Readers in their further training. These bequests go back many decades – the story goes that Miss Myland decided to set up a fund in parallel to the Adams one that was already in existence, when she was sitting on a staircase having lunch at a CRC meeting, to which she could not be admitted because of her gender.

The original sums have been invested and the income available for initial training (and should reside within one of the dioceses of the Church of England or of the Church in Wales).

- Applications must be for programmes, courses or research in the broad field of theology, with the aim of enhancing the applicant’s knowledge and practice as a Reader.
- The programme, course or research is normally part-time and offered by an accredited institution (including distance-learning) situated within the British Isles.
- Every application must be supported by the Warden of Readers in the applicant’s home diocese.
- An application for a diocesan grant must be submitted to the Reader’s diocese prior to an application being made to the Central Readers’ Council: the outcome of the diocesan application however does not impinge on eligibility for a grant from the Adams-Myland fund.
- The maximum grant at the time of writing is £450 p.a.


Gertrud Sollars

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**Serving Together**

**Celebrating • Sharing • Learning**

**In Memoriam**

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<th>Bath &amp; Wells</th>
<th>Chelmsford</th>
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<td>Alan Hawker</td>
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<td>Myra Gentry</td>
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<td>William Johnson</td>
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**Admitted and Licensed**

- Richard Edward Appleton transferred from Chelmsford Diocese
- James Robert Ashdown transferred from Swansea and Brecon Diocese
- David Morgan Bunday (Morgan) transferred from Ely Diocese
- Heather Bunting transferred from Bristol Diocese
- Mark Charles Stewart Cresswell transferred from St Albans Diocese
- Sandra Margaret Griffiths (Sandy) transferred from Southwark Diocese

- Barbara Elizabeth Hill transferred from Southwark Diocese
- Rosalind Kay Leggett (Roz) transferred from Rochester Diocese
- Winifred Maud Sutton (Win) Transferred from Norwich Diocese

- Jennifer Ann Catchpole (Jenny) Transferred from Southwark Diocese
- John Arnold Gillett
- Nicola Tindall
- Jane Margaret Woods
- Miriam Webb

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**Deadlines for information to be included in Gazette and In Memoriam**

**Spring ‘18 issue**: To be submitted before Tuesday 21 November 2017

**Summer ‘18 issue**: To be submitted before Tuesday 20 February 2018

Please email gazette@cofereadermag.co.uk

**READER EDITOR EMAIL ADDRESS**

Just to remind you, the address for all editorial enquiries and communications is now editor@cofereadermag.co.uk
Letters from Readers

The words of our fathers?

I read the article on the BCP in the last edition with great interest. I still have a soft spot for it!

I graduated in Economics and Russian in the ’50s and have been to Russia many times, and I am still a Trustee of a charity which helps to run a private orphanage near Moscow which I helped to found after Communism collapsed. When in Moscow I have always attended the Church of St Catherine near the Tretyakov Gallery.

When Common Worship was published, the parish priest of St Catherine’s said to me on one of my visits, ‘I see the Church of England has yet another prayer book’. At the end of the ensuing discussion I held up my Russian prayer book and asked him, ‘What is the date of this?’

He replied that it was still the original of 998 AD, explaining that they believe you should hear what your forefathers have heard since time immemorial.

An interesting thought!

J. M.

James Snowdon
Reader Emeritus, Diocese of Birmingham

What’s in a name?

My incumbent has recently taken to referring to me in parish communications etc. as a ‘Retired Reader’. I have challenged this on the basis that, although I’m now 80 I am as busy, if not more so, than ever and this after 35 years as a Reader.

I’m certainly not retired and have no wish to be! My Diocesan Warden of Readers has confirmed that ‘Retired Reader’ is incorrect, and that I should be called ‘Reader with PTO’ (Permission to Officiate).

To the uninitiated, it seems to me that this latter title could be misunderstood and ‘Reader with PTO’ might suggest that someone referred to as just ‘Reader’ is somehow lacking something (other than age!).

I cannot see any need for differentiation in title after the age of 70. We Readers are all volunteers and do not ‘retire’ in the usual meaning of the word. Why can we not just be called ‘Readers’?

Bryan R. Lawson
Reader Emeritus

Once a Reader ...

A few years ago I took ‘Emeritus’ after what was a Reader ministry of twenty years or so. Like others, I had taken over a hundred funerals and helped at or conducted numerous services in our diocese.

From that time onwards though I have been virtually ignored by my benefice, and also by the benefice in which I reside. I feel it is sad that ‘Emeritus’ can mean ‘Thank you and get lost’. The occasional opportunity to preach or help out at times wouldn’t hurt.

The local nursing home, however, welcomes me with open arms, as does the Methodist Church with its fabulous Christian group of people.

How do other Readers’ experiences compare?

Andrew Walker is Secretary of the Central Readers’ Council

Training fit for purpose?

I was interested to read in Alan Wakely’s farewell message his remarks on our ‘Ministry of the Third Age’. He points out that many Readers are now retired and grey-haired; and in some places there are more nowadays with PTO and grey-haired; and that in some places ‘Ministry of the Third Age’.

He points to the retirement message his remarks on our Training fit for purpose?

We have new supplies of Readers’ badges, but we need to adjust the prices to make sure they do not sell at a loss.

As before, prices include postage and packing. You can order by writing to Central Readers’ Council (Badges), Church House, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3AZ, stating the number of badges, and of which type, and enclose the appropriate remittance by cheque made payable to the Central Readers’ Council.

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<td>Small enamel badge</td>
<td>£4.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Small chrome badge</td>
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J. M.

John Stott
Lay Minister with PTO, Devizes

Postscript

Andrew Walker is Secretary of the Central Readers’ Council

After one of my workplace carol services, there was an exchange between our speaker and one of the congregation (not one of our employees) that went along these lines:

**Visitor:** I’m not religious, but I was very interested in what you said about ….

**Speaker:** I’m not religious either, but the point of Christianity is that it is about a person ….

The reason is surely not far to seek. The large numbers of younger Readers. Entirely we are not being replaced by adds that as we retire from ministry there are more nowadays with PTO and grey-haired; and that in some places ‘Ministry of the Third Age’. He points to the retirement message his remarks on our Training fit for purpose?

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