

GOOD NEWS

FOR NORWICH & NORFOLK

Easter 2015: FREE

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Norwich Bishop leads call to engage in politics

■ The Bishop of Norwich has led a nationwide call for church-goers to get involved in politics ahead of the May 7 General Election, to put aside self-interest and to vote for 'the common good'.

The House of Bishops of the Church of England expressed the hope for political parties to discern "a fresh moral vision of the kind of country we want to be" ahead of the election.

In a pastoral letter from the House of Bishops to the people and parishes of the Church of England, the Bishops urge Christians to consider the question how can we "build the kind of society which many people say they want but which is not yet being expressed in the vision of any parties?"

The letter also encourages church members to

engage in the political process ahead of the General Election and to put aside self-interest and vote for 'the common good': "The privileges of living in a democracy mean that we should use our votes thoughtfully, prayerfully and with the good of others in mind not just our own interests."

The Bishop of Norwich, the Rt Revd Graham James, said: "This pastoral letter isn't addressed to politicians but to members of the Church of England. It encourages them to use their vote and get involved in politics, since even within the Church we sense a growing disengagement."

"Just recently a Foodbank volunteer told me she had given up on politics and one of our youth leaders said he wouldn't vote. Russell Brand may

have more influence than I had thought. While bishops may not be as attractive as Russell Brand we can urge members of our Church to regard politics as immensely worthwhile and a way to create a better society."

The letter states: "In Britain, we have become so used to believing that self-interest drives every decision, that it takes a leap of imagination to argue that there should be stronger institutions for those we disagree with as well as for those 'on our side.' Breaking free of self-interest and welcoming our opponents as well as our supporters into a messy, noisy, yet rich and creative community of communities is, perhaps, the only way we will enrich our almost-moribund political culture."



Rev David Austin.

David set to take over at St Luke's

■ **NORWICH:** The new vicar for St Luke's, St Augustine's and C3 church in New Catton, Norwich, has been named as Rev David Austin, a former homeless and mental health outreach worker.

David, who is currently a curate at St Peter's, Addingham near Bradford, will be moving to Norwich in June.

David spent a year in Birmingham with the City Mission learning about Urban Evangelism - door-to-door witness, preaching in the Bullring and handing out tracts, selling Bibles in the market and running Children's Bible clubs. The mission also ran a traditional soup kitchen and hostel for homeless men.

"It was here that I got my first experience of homeless work and this led me to spending 20 years in Manchester and East London as an Outreach & Care Manager for the homeless and those with psychiatric needs," said David.

David spent three years with a Missionary Society (YWAM) in London, Mexico and Liverpool and three years as a Community Member of the Anglican Franciscans (Society of St Francis) in East London, whilst testing out his vocation. He also did a two-year diploma at the London Bible College in the mid 1980s.

"For me, the essence of Christianity is 'renewed humanity' through the God-Man Jesus Christ. Wherever people are seeking to renew themselves by loving their neighbours and being true to what they know of God, I believe healing and transformation can occur."

"I believe we have the potential 'In Christ' to repair our broken lives and broken communities when Heaven breaks through to Earth and God's will is seen on Earth as in Heaven," said David. "We need to work for the advancement of God's Kingdom and not just restrict ourselves to living within the Church."

David studied theology at St John's (Cranmer Hall) Durham in 2009-2011 and the training included practical placements in a high security prison and a summer placement in the Durban townships in South Africa.

Election hustings

■ **NORWICH:** Transforming Norwich will be staging the traditional General Election hustings events for local Parliamentary candidates in two city churches leading up to the May 7 poll.

The hustings for candidates in the Norwich North constituency will be at Norwich Central Baptist Church on April 16 and the one for Norwich South will be at Holy Trinity church on April 29. More details will be confirmed nearer the time. All are welcome..

Norfolk High Sheriff is a real champion

High Sheriff of Norfolk, Lady Pippa Dannatt, has used her 12 months in the ceremonial office to champion a cause very close to her heart - that of mental health. **Helen Baldry** reports.

Married to the former head of the British Army Lord, Richard Dannatt, Pippa is a trained counsellor - she has worked for 18 years for Relate and with a number of GP surgeries.

Mental health problems are something she is very used to being around, and experienced herself with postnatal depression after the birth of two of her four children. She encourages people to be honest about mental health issues. "The more people talk about it the less scary, less of a taboo there is."

A highlight of Lady Dannatt's year as High Sheriff - traditionally the Queen's representative for law enforcement - has been meeting the unsung heroes of the voluntary sector, particularly the number of women and their selfless commitment to other people.

Pippa was made an MBE in 2013 for her work with SSAFA, in particular spearheading a £5m fundraising drive to

provide decent standards of accommodation for military families visiting their injured loved ones.

The Dannatts worship at their village church in Keswick, South Norfolk, and have always felt it right to belong to their local church in the village where Lady Dannatt was born.

Of her own Christian faith, she says: "Faith matures, and perhaps one becomes increasingly aware of the things that are really, really important. I've become more accepting of other people just as they are."

"Actually, all that matters at the end of the day is love. It sounds so simplistic, doesn't it, but what a different place the world would be if we only truly loved our neighbour - whoever, and wherever he or she might be - as ourselves."

Pippa, who first met future husband Richard while studying for a theology degree at Durham University, raised her family at various army bases around the world, following her husband's career right to the pinnacle of the British Army. In fact, the family moved 24 times in 34 years. She described moving around as 'tough' but also said, "being an army wife makes you very independent", this is evident in the way she and her husband undertake their own roles and projects.

Lady Dannatt is part of the Gurney family, whose Norfolk history stretches back

■ **story continues on page 4**



The High Sheriff of Norfolk, Lady Pippa Dannatt. Picture by Julia Holland.

GOOD NEWS

FOR NORWICH & NORFOLK

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■ Churches, Christian organisations and individuals from within Norwich and Norfolk are invited to send news, events and pictures which relate to the demonstration of the Gospel in social action, community care and evangelism generally.

This will not only encourage those Christians involved in similar activities but also inform leaders in other churches who are contemplating similar forms of outreach.

■ The deadline for material for the Celebrate edition is Friday May 1. Distribution is from Thursday May 21.

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The profound truth of the Easter story

■ Traditionally for Christians, the run-up to Easter - Lent - is the time when we examine ourselves, maybe even deny ourselves a little, create some time and space and use that space to grow closer to God. For some it's a penitential time, a time when we look more closely at how we fall short of who God would have us aspire to be.

It's an inescapable fact that as priests in the Church of England many people, rightly, have high expectations of who they think we are, of who I am. And I often wonder if people, optimistically, expect us to have some kind of constant hotline to God, an overwhelmingly close and transformational relationship with Christ and the ability to serenely pray our way through the ups and downs of life's rocky road. Well, let me let you all into a little secret - life for us too can become overwhelming and the God we love and have committed our lives to, can seem silent and a long way off.

In my benefice this Lent we've been thinking about Job and the more time I spend getting to know this book the more I realise I have a certain empathy for how Job felt. For I can't help but feel compassion with Job as he struggles with loving God - understanding and appreciating how great God is and yet feeling abandoned and angry with the situation he finds himself in. We have no idea what the timescale of the book is, it may be that Job was in this dark, dark place for a very long time - it's no wonder that he felt the deepest sense of despair,



Rev
Suzanne
Cooke
Priest-in-
Charge
Upper Tas
Valley
Benefice

a despair that I think is often echoed in and by the people we encounter in our lives.

I have been struck recently by Stephen Fry's outburst on the Gaye Burne show, when he was asked why he was an atheist and what he would say to God if he met him at the Pearly Gates. His anger at God struck a cord with me as I thought that his words gave a voice to many in modern society, who either have no relationship or time for God or those who feel they don't deserve the hand they have been dealt and watch those 'less deserving', thrive and breeze along, enjoying an easy life.

We have all encountered people whose life has taken them to dark places and who feel themselves justified, as Job did, in feeling despair and anger at God, who feel abandoned by all that is good in our world. Stephen Fry, in his interview, was particularly angry at why children should suffer with bone cancer. Job's

friends where so initially overwhelmed by the situation that engulfed their friend that their response was to sit with him in silence for seven days. Suffice it to say that there are many who can understand and sympathise with Fry's anger and dismay. I've heard it said that we are an "Easter people". But what might that mean to someone that believes they have no reason to believe in the healing power of Christ? What, in the face of such innocent suffering, does our Christian faith have to offer us, to offer them?

I believe the essence of our Christian story lies in the profound truth that we create beauty, transformation and wholeness out of death, brokenness and despair. We are an Easter people! We are a people who believe that hope resides even in the most hopeless of situations, even in the deepest pits of despair. And this is because in our darkest moments we can choose to turn to the face of Christ and know that the inescapable pain of being human can become the very moment we are transformed, the very moment we come closest to the God who loves us unconditionally, the very moment we can be overcome by the healing, loving power of God through Jesus Christ.

I cannot presume to change the minds and hearts of those who may have heard these words many times before. But I have an honest faith in the truth and power of God's transformational love, and I can only hope that my life might witness to this one overwhelmingly wonderful fact.

Genesis doubles capacity

Norfolk Christian project the **House of Genesis** has just opened a second house in **Norwich** doubling its capacity to provide supported accommodation for vulnerable men in the city. **Helen Baldry** reports.

The acquisition of the house on Dereham Road in Norwich, which previously was standing empty, means that The House of Genesis' now has 12 rooms available.

The existing property on Laundry Close in Thorpe has been recently extended with a new external room and a converted garage. The new house is a four-bedroom end terrace and will be in operation from March.

The House of Genesis was founded by Val Dodsworth who started the project from her house in Sprowston in 2000 a few years after

the death of her husband Bill. Fifteen years on, the team of staff and volunteers has grown. Val describes them as "Wonderful, innovative and go-ahead staff". They are guided by a team of Christian trustees who have overseen the project since 2005.

The House of Genesis is run as a home for single homeless men. The accommodation is usually needed for between 6 and 12 months and is a stop-gap while the men find their feet again. Some of the residents are ex-offenders looking for a fresh start. Some are homeless, often due to a breakdown in a relationship. Most residents are aged between early 20s and early 40s

Principles of basic respect are adhered to and there is a no alcohol and no drug policy, making this a real opportunity for change. "Those things make us different; the lads feel very chilled here - they are wonderful lads," said Paula, one of the House of Genesis volunteers. There are no locks on the doors and the house has a real family feel - with Bertie the bulldog curled up on the office floor, a part of the family!



Donna Myall, Paula and Val Dodsworth outside one of the House of Genesis homes.

The project is unique in the way they will take anybody who needs help. No other hostels will take children or dogs. Project leader, Donna Myall, said: "We took in a young lad and his dog who wouldn't be separated and had been living in a tent locally. We supported them until they were able to move on from us."

The team is excited about plans to open a father and child unit.

The house on Dereham Road is preparing for its first residents and Donna said, "I am looking forward to getting my teeth into our new project and home, and to being able to help many more lads as they re-start their disrupted life journeys."

If you would like a speaker from The House of Genesis to come to your church or organisation, please contact Val on v.dodsworth@ntlworld.com

If you are interested in volunteering at the Dereham Road house, please email thogenesis@btconnect.com or ring 01603 435449.

www.thehouseofgenesis.org



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Above, the Bishop of Norwich dedicates volunteers for Norwich Street Partnership and below, chair of trustees Rev Deb Cousins.

Service marks return to streets of Norwich

A new beginning in the special ministry of Norwich Street Partnership was marked with a service of re-dedication by the Bishop of Norwich at St Stephens Church in the city on February 19 after an absence of more than one year. **Keith Morris reports.**

Dedicating around 20 volunteer street partners and prayer partners, the Rt Rev Graham James said: "Never underestimate the power of kindness. God's kindness should lead us to repentance, kindness can transform and, I believe, can convert. We are more likely to be brought to faith in Christ by kindness than by arguments, no matter how theologically correct. I wonder how many of us have been shaped in our faith by kindness more than we have by sermons. NSP is in the business of kindness."

"I am very glad that you are back on the streets of Norwich, being kind and caring for those who are disorientated, desperate or disorderly is hugely challenging. How can we, who were bought by grace, refuse to reach out to those who are in need? What you are doing is not simply social work, it is true Gospel work and a symbol of the unconditional friendship of God."

Chair of Trustees, Rev Deb Cousins, said: Although our teams returned to the streets of Norwich just before Christmas, we wanted to ask God to seal all that he has done in the past, and to bless our future ministry alongside other agencies in the night-time economy.

"This service is the culmination of over a year of heart search, prayer, hard work and commitment from everyone involved in NSP to get to this point in our journey when we can resume our active ministry as churches together

on the streets of our county. It marks a new chapter, a new beginning, for NSP as an ecumenical Christian organisation. It is also a hopeful and encouraging sign to the wider church that, energised by the power the Holy Spirit, the Christ light is being taken out to the streets again."

During the service three long-standing team members gave their own personal experiences of being out on the streets or as part of the prayer team.

Peter Gosling said: "We often feel the presence of God in our interactions on the streets. For me it has helped me to look at the city in a different way and there is a lot of warmth and respect on the streets for the street partners."

Andy Driver said: "We have lots of people from different denominations working together and it is a privilege sitting there and praying with them."

John Pennington said: "Jesus asks us to be with the marginalized in our society. Life on the streets is both very superficial and also one of the loneliest places there is."

The teams are back on the streets once every two weeks at present but are planning to increase the frequency.

If you are interested in getting involved, would like further information about Norfolk Street Partnership, or would like someone to give a talk about its work to your group, please contact: Rev Deb Cousins at deb@nspuk.org or on 01603 738329 or visit www.nspuk.org.



Norfolk Christian news website marks its tenth anniversary

■ The Network Norwich & Norfolk website is set to mark a decade of serving the local Christian community this year and has a number of initiatives planned to celebrate the achievement including news features, media training events and a first-ever Norfolk Christian Digital Communications Awards.

The website, which provides a news and information service for the Christian community across Norfolk, was launched in October 2005, backed by Transforming Norwich and local Christian charity Dreams & Visions.

Launch editor Keith Morris is still at the helm, now as publisher, and has been joined over the years by other team members, who now include senior content editor Helen Baldry and regional content editors Tony Rothe and Andy Latham.

Countless volunteers have contributed articles and opinion columns to the site, which has been backed by numerous local Christian organizations, charities and churches for whom the website helps provide a vital communications channel.

Over the past ten years the site has published over 3,000 news articles, over 1,000 stories for its partner organisations and around 400 opinion columns.

It has also published hundreds of job and volunteer opportunities, church and project directory entries, adverts for local businesses and Christian organizations and thousands of diary dates.

It has also won several national Christian media awards.

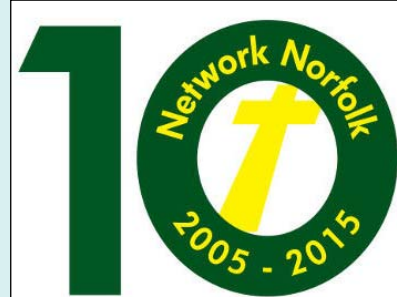
Keith said: "To mark the anniversary, we will be publishing a monthly archive news column looking back at some of the biggest stories over the past ten years."

"We will also be holding a couple of training events for our supporters and readers, giving them the opportunity to learn about digital communications, writing news stories and press releases and the secrets of social media."

"To round off the year, we also plan to stage a first-ever Norfolk Christian Digital Communications Awards when we will invite entries from across the county and give all of our readers the opportunity to vote of which websites, blogs and social media channels should be recognised," said Keith.

There will be offering a limited number of opportunities for local Christian organizations or churches to sponsor part of the awards and if you are interested, please email Keith Morris at keith.morris@networknorwich.co.uk

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Norwich Bible Conference 2015

■ **NORWICH:** This year's Norwich Anglican Bible Conference is hosted by Holy Trinity Church in Norwich on Saturday June 6, looking at the book of Haggai, and will be led by Paul Perkin, part of the leadership team of the New Wine Network for the London & South-East Region, and of the Holy Trinity Brompton network, is on the Council of Reform and chairs the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans in the UK and Ireland.

The Conference is being held at Holy Trinity Church, Trinity Street, Norwich and following registration and coffee from 9.30 the day starts at 10am with four sessions on the book of Haggai; finishing at 4pm with regular coffee breaks, lunch break and times of prayer and praise throughout the day.

The cost for the day is £14, including a light lunch. Details from Rev Martin Young 01603 498821 or <http://nabconf.wordpress.com/>



Giving thanks for Who Cares? mission

Norfolk Sheriff is a real champion

■ **story continues from front page**

generations and has Quaker roots. Her house in Keswick has always been her home and she is very fond of the area. Pippa loves the Norfolk coastline and spending time with her large family - including six grandsons and four great-nephews.

A particular place of sanctuary for her is Norwich Cathedral, where she is inspired by the centuries of prayer: "It's just amazing; the joys, and the hopes and the sorrows; everything that building has seen and encapsulates; every brick breathes it," she says.

The appointment as High Sheriff of Norfolk is something of a family tradition - Lady Dannatt's father and grandfather both held the role - and as her own year as High Sheriff comes to a close, Lady Dannatt is determined to continue her work in the area of mental health.

She is also incredibly proud of the work of her eldest son, Tom who devotes much of his time and resources to helping street children in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Tom, who founded the charity Street Child in 2008, is yet another member of this high-profile family who has a remarkable strength and ability to demonstrate their love for people in practical ways.

The Who Cares? mission has seen 60 churches come together across Norfolk in a mission that began by simply asking local people to share 'what hurts the most'. They received around 20,000 responses to their one-question survey.

The thanksgiving evening was held at St Thomas' Church in Norwich and was well attended by people from Norfolk churches which have been involved in the mission, as well as some of the Newday young people who helped to complete the survey.

Rob Tervet, project leader, thanked God for all the churches that caught the vision. Rob explained how every person responds differently to the question and a common response is that people think it's great that the church is asking this question. Many people have been moved, and many have received prayer. One person was taken aback by the questions and said, "I didn't know that anybody cared." Some churches knocked on every single door in their community to ask the question.

Following the listening phase, the largest single Alpha supper ever in the UK was held at the Norfolk Showground with 1,400 people attending. Hundreds of events, activities and new ideas have happened as a result of local churches responding to the concerns raised in

An evening of thanksgiving for the **Who Cares?** mission was held on February 7. Special guest **Sandy Millar** spoke about the unanimity of spirit needed to continue the work. **Helen Baldry** reports.

their local areas.

Norwich Youth For Christ (NYFC) surveyed 4,000 school children and the topics of bullying, relationship problems and death were raised. By way of response, an anti-bullying project has been launched and a remembrance service for pupils and their families to help deal with their grief is planned. Who Cares? has opened the doors to schools where previously NYFC has no access.

Stuart Bailey, from South Park Evangelical Church, spoke about Who Cares from a church perspective. He described the concept as a perfect way to reach out to the local estate of 1,000 people. The church held a holiday club and they also held discussion events to address

the top five 'hurts'. Challenging topics were covered, such as immigration. The church started regular activities, including a men's group. People came to faith through these events, including Daniel, who spoke at the thanksgiving evening of his experience of becoming a Christian after being invited to the church. "I felt I belonged there. I knew without any shadow of a doubt that I wanted to become a Christian - and I did so that night."

Special guest for the thanksgiving evening was Sandy Millar, previously the vicar at Holy Trinity Brompton the birthplace of the Alpha Course, The Marriage Course, and one of the largest Anglican churches in the country.

Sandy said that unity is a God-given thing and that unanimity of spirit comes from doing what Jesus came to do. "Christians tend to define themselves on what they believe. Non-Christians define us by what we do."

Sandy spoke of church planting and equipping the next generation to reach the people around them with the love of Jesus. He said, "It takes a radical church to reach a radically lost world."

The emphasis of the evening was to thank God for what has been done, although the Who Cares? leadership team were clear that this isn't the end of the mission and are seeking what the next steps are.



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Appeal to help fulfil Jo's dying MP prayer card vision

Norwich church-goer **Colin Grey** is appealing to Christians across Norfolk to help him fulfil the dying vision of his wife **Joanne**, to produce hand-stitched prayer cards for every single MP and member of the House of Lords. **Keith Morris** reports.

Jo, a developmental studies graduate from UEA, died in January, aged 37, from non-Hodgkin lymphoma, 15 months after undergoing a successful kidney transplant from her mother Janice at Addenbrooke's Hospital near Cambridge.

Last August, Jo suffered from leg and back pain and following an MRI scan was admitted to the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital for treatment and non-Hodgkin lymphoma was diagnosed. Following treatment, Jo was able to return home briefly for Christmas Day but died in hospital on January 17.

The couple attended New Hope Christian Centre in Lakenham, Norwich, where Jo's memorial service was held on February 9.

Five years ago, Jo was reading David Stern's Complete Jewish Bible and

came across a verse in Proverbs 10:9 which reads: "He who walks purely walks securely, but he who walks in crooked ways will be found out."

It was about the time of the MPs' expenses scandal and Jo felt God give her a vision to send prayer cards with the first part of the verse - He who walks purely walks securely - on them to every single MP and member of the House of Lords. There are currently around 650 MPs and 790 Lords.

In 2009, Jo wrote down her vision. She wrote: "It was the first part of the verse that caught my attention, and as I read it, the Lord dropped into my Spirit a very simple cross stitch design with the idea to turn it into cards to be sent to every member of the House of Commons and the House of Lords. It struck me that this phrase was a fantastic sound bite that could strike a chord with those who would receive it, as modern politics seems to be full of slogans and clever words. The wording for the inside of the cards will read 'May True Wisdom guide you in all that you do'.

"From the time I first received this vision it has been clear that I am to include as many people as possible in it, and therefore am looking for people who will catch this vision, and have the skills and time to get involved in this with me."

Colin, who works as an IT tutor in Norwich, said: "The cards are not meant as a criticism but really are saying to MPs that people are supporting you and praying for you."

Jo was a huge cross-stitch enthusiast and over the last



Above, Colin and Jo Grey and, below left, one of the cross-stitched prayer cards.

five years she spent literally hundreds of hours carefully stitching 731 cards. For her they were a work of art and of prayer. She was even stitching in hospital just two days before she died.

"Jo felt very strongly that this was a task that God has given her to do and was her way of expressing support for our nation and Parliament and that prayer was vital in this," said Colin. "The idea is that people pray for the MPs and lords, Parliament and our nation while they are stitching."

And now Colin is appealing for support from anyone who can help complete Jo's legacy and see her vision fulfilled.

"Hundreds of hours of labour and prayer have already gone into them and Jo's greatest wish was that she could

complete them herself and it really inspired her," said Colin.

"Her dying wish was that they are all completed and delivered. It would be wonderful if her death could mobilize and inspire a network of people to do something practical and prayerful for our country."

It takes two to three hours to complete each cross-stitch which is then inserted into a pre-printed card holder. One or two of Jo's friends have already taken up the mantle and Call to Prayer in Norwich is supporting the project.

Hilda Gordon, from Call to Prayer, who also helps to run an all-party Parliamentary prayer group in the House of Commons, has offered to help get the cards distributed once they are complete.

"I will write a letter to

accompany the cards saying who Jo was, how she battled with her illnesses and the purpose of the cards," said Colin.

I don't know how I could have coped and supported Jo without my Christian faith," he said. "I think I may have just given up. My faith and the support of my friends from church and Christian groups has been a real strength to me."

"Jo's faith and belief helped her in her physical battles and motivated her to continue stitching the prayer cards right up until she died."

If you want to support Colin and get involved with the effort to finish the cards and see them delivered then you can find out more at call2prayer.co.uk/ppcards/ or email Colin at prayercards@colingrey.com



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Maureen's work is honoured by Queen

■ **Maureen Bond founded a luncheon club in a Norwich church 30 years ago and was awarded a BEM in the Queen's New Year Honours List in January for her services to the club and her local community. Helen Baldry reports.**

■ Maureen founded the club at Dereham Road Baptist Church in 1985 and it is now based at Chapel Field Methodist Church. It offers elderly people the opportunity to enjoy home-cooked food and companionship.

The club has grown over the years and has been described as a 'hub of laughter' and is greatly appreciated by around 50 people who attend every Monday to socialise and enjoy a nutritious meal.

Maureen was awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) for her services

to the club. She not only uses her cooking skills, but also organises regular activities for members of the club to take part in each week, including talks, music and outings. Her involvement requires a lot of time and energy but Maureen is committed to the community that has built up around the club over the years. "I absolutely love what I do," she said.

Many local residents use the service, which is made possible by Maureen and a team of other volunteers from the Christian community.

Most members of the lunch club live in the local neighbourhood and are referrals from Social Services, enabling Maureen and her team to have a vital impact on people who might otherwise be lonely and isolated.

Maureen said, "It's nice to think that my work has been recognised but the award is for everyone, it's not just for me."

Janet bids farewell to Norwich

■ **NORWICH:** Former pub landlady and social worker Rev Janet Wyer left her post as associate priest at St Peter Mancroft in Norwich city centre after five years on March 15 after being appointed as rector of the Kessingland Benefice near Lowestoft.

After being a landlady of a village pub for 11 years and a social worker Janet's calling to ordained ministry came after reading about a long-serving woman verger at Norwich Cathedral.

The next day Janet saw a job-share advert for a verger at St Peter Mancroft, which she got. Janet was also appointed in 2004 as a youth worker where she inspired many with her energy and ideas. It was this role which prompted Janet to start exploring her calling to ordained ministry.

In 2007, Janet left St Peter Mancroft to take up her curacy at the Chet Valley Benefice which serves in parishes of Chedgrave, Hales, Hardley, Heckingham, Langley, Loddon and Sisland in Norfolk.

Janet returned to St Peter Mancroft in 2010 with many ideas and plenty of energy. During her time Janet set up the very popular St Peter's Playtime & St Peter's Praise in which children are invited to participate in worship and discover who Jesus is with messy crafts and worship.

Janet also oversaw the running of a toddlers group called Noah's Ark and Church Without Walls which gives people an opportunity to engage with Jesus in an informal setting.

All of this complimented her work as a trustee of Celebrate Norfolk, chair of trustees for Churches Together in Central Norwich and her work with Transforming Norwich.

Janet was asked to lead prayers for the city's Christmas lights switch on and other civic ceremonies within the city. She was also chaplain to YMCA Norfolk and the All Saints Centre.

Burning desire for

Norwich is one of 20 UK cities where Christians are expressing themselves in "Burns" consisting of 12 to 100 hours of non-stop worship and prayer at least once a month. **Kevin Gotts reports.**

The vision for Burn Norwich specifically, came out of a 3-day worship festival called 'David's Tent'. JJ Waters, one of the organisers of Burn Norwich, explained: "We launched in September 2012 with an incredible 12 hours of worship in a tent in a field!"

"The hunger for more of God was evident as people encountered Him in new ways, in the thick presence of God many were healed, delivered, and even baptised in the sea the next day!"

The Burn started in 2006 out of spontaneous, all-night worship nights at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The grassroots worship, prayer and mission movement soon spread to a local coffee shop and then to

local churches.

A typical Burn is 4 to 24 hours long, and consists of what is called 'vertical worship' as the focus is entirely on ministering to God, and the first and greatest commandment to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matt 22:37, Mark 12:30).

"Burn 24-7 is a movement of people gathering to pursue the Presence of God, see unity build and the transformation of our cities and regions," explains JJ.

"We have been seeing glimpses of this in Norwich. For nearly two and a half years now, we have been meeting monthly in different locations across the city partnering with churches, the

House of Prayer and bigger events like Celebrate Norwich to worship Jesus for 4, 6, 12 and 24 hours.

"We invite worship-leaders from different churches in the city to come together as one, to seek the presence of God together. Sometimes there is a focus on intercession, other times we do street outreach, and sometimes we simply worship Jesus because after all, He is worthy."

"We value prophetic worship and create a space for musicians to release creative, spontaneous and prophetic songs over the city. We sometimes send teams out during or after the Burn to share the love of Jesus on the streets," says JJ.

"In one recent 24-hour Burn at 'The Beacon' (St Elizabeth's) on the Earlham estate in Norwich, six young people came in off the streets during the Burn and gave their lives to Jesus, and we heard there was breakthrough in the church after that," said JJ.

"At the last Burn in February, a man came in who had severe chronic back pain since a child. During the worship, he felt to pray for healing, and was totally healed!"

"He has been free of pain since, praise Jesus. We know when God shows up, anything is possible so are believing for even greater things (John 14:12)!"

"Last month we stood in faith for one lady whose friends desperately needed rain in a particular part of Kenya. Stepping into our authority in Christ (Luke 10:19, Mark 4:39) we prayed, and the next day we heard news that rain had come."

"At other Burns people



John and Krystyna Piercy.

Adrian Plass mov

Christian humourist and writer **Adrian Plass** is set to back the pioneering work of two Norwich teachers, who have made 26 mission trips to aid destitute people in Eastern Europe, by appearing at a special evening event in **Norwich** on May 20. **Mike Wiltshire reports.**

■ Well-known speaker and author, Adrian, was so impressed by the pioneering work of John and Krystyna Piercy that he has offered to present a special evening to support their remarkable ministry of mercy.

Over the past few years, Norwich maths teacher John and his Polish wife, Krystyna, a gifted linguist, have made regular overland journeys - 3,600 miles round trip each time - to deliver urgently needed medical supplies to destitute, disabled and aged survivors of the Hungarian Holocaust.

John and Krystyna, who speaks five languages, first met as trainee teachers at King's College, London. As Christians, they felt led to do

non-stop worship



latest news

■ **LOWESTOFT:** Burn Lowestoft launched on March 7, with Burn Global leader Jamie Dickson leading the event.

■ **NORWICH:** Norwich Roy Godwin of Ffald-y-Brenin, a real father of the prayer movement, will be joining the Burn on Friday April 17, sharing testimonies of what God is doing.

■ **FURTHER INFORMATION:** www.facebook.com/BurnNorwich or email: jjj.waters@theburn247.com

have come in and been so touched by God that they have given their lives to Jesus."

The movement has caught the attention of a number of Norfolk church leaders:

"The Burn brings together a host of different traditional ways of praying and gives

them a format that draws younger people. It is a prayer form for our pick and mix culture which I welcome," said Rev Madeline Light, St Stephen's Norwich.

"I love the vision and passion behind Burn to see churches come together in a way which glorifies God and

releases encounter with the Father's love. We have seen an increase in intimacy with Him and the revelation and healing which flows out of prioritising relationship with Jesus above all else," said Rev Stephen Mawditt, at the Fountain Network, Ashill.

"They have been building a

'Unity of the Holy Spirit' across the many churches from which people have been drawn... I personally believe the Lord is using the 24/7 'Burns' across the nation to prepare for a move of God," said David Cairns of Heartbeat Ministries Norwich.

ed by Norwich mercy mission

mission work in Hungary - and discovered "the incredible need" for medical supplies among elderly war victims, especially those being helped by the Jewish Hospital. To help, John and Krystyna set up the Shalom Habakkuk Trust.

Seventy years ago, many Jews were drowned in the River Danube in the Spring of 1944 - part of a terror campaign in which 500,000 Hungarian Jews were killed.

"Today, many elderly survivors live in abject poverty, some near to death, because of lack of food and warmth," says John, director of the Trust.

"We hope many friends in Norfolk will come along to our special evening with Adrian Plass on May 20," says John.



Author Adrian Plass.

Adrian, author of 35 books, the most well-known being the gentle satire, *The Secret Diary of Adrian Plass* aged 37 and three-quarters - which has sold over

a million copies - says he and his wife, Bridget, are "very excited about the fun evening with a serious aim."

The event will take place on May 20 at the Willow Centre, on Willowcroft Road, Cringleford, Norwich, NR4 7JJ, (7-9pm).

Tickets are £5, (£10 for families), with free tea and coffee.

There will be an offering for the work of the Trust, and the evening will include special music and a display of painting by local artist Nigel Carder.

For more details of the Adrian Plass evening, call John Piercy on 01603 880 881 or Paul McHenry at the Living Stones Christian Fellowship, sponsors of the event, on 07832 026622.

www.shalomhabakkuktrust.org

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Church dementia project boost

■ A day centre and friendship club run by a Norwich church's social action arm has received £115,000 from the National Lottery to help support older people with early onset dementia over the next three years.

Lakenham Day Centre and Friendship Club is run by social action charity Community Action Norwich and based at the New Hope Christian Centre on Martineau Lane.

The £115,000 of Big Lottery Fund cash over three years will enable the staff team to create programmes which support older people with early onset dementia according to Deputy Day Centre Manager, Margaret Wiginton, who is managing the project.

"The activities will help to improve the lives of older people with memory difficulties, through Cognitive Stimulation Therapy and other activities," she said. "This will support them and their families to develop coping strategies for every day tasks, with a view to enable



them to live independently and stay in their own home longer.

"Alongside this we will develop a six-month volunteer placement scheme for unemployed school leavers and those seeking to re-enter the work place after a gap. They will explore opportunities in health and social care of older people and receive basic training in related

areas, including a personal development module, preparing them to access employment."

Anyone interested in the Day Centre or the Volunteering Placement Scheme should contact Community Action Norwich and speak to Georgina or Margaret on 01603 617771 or email communityaction@virgin.net

Project is a life-changer

For Paul Bale, who was born without eyes, his daily routine at the award-winning **St Michael's Workshop** in **Bowthorpe, Norwich**, has been a life-changing experience. **Mike Wiltshire** reports.

Paul's mum, Sandra, says she is so grateful for the pioneering workshop project which has given Paul - who was once withdrawn - "fresh confidence... and his work has kept him happy."

For 18 years Paul has loved singing to radio as he and other trainees produce wooden educational products that are sent far and wide - not only across the UK but worldwide. Paul also loves listening to cricket and football commentaries and enjoys "power walking" in his spare time.

Paul, aged 45, and the team and staff at St Michael's Workshop have been invited to a Mayoral reception in March, ahead of the workshop's 30th anniversary celebration on Saturday, May 16.

Friends past and present - and anyone interested - are welcome to attend the celebration day (11am to 4pm). The well-equipped workshop - adjacent to Bowthorpe Church, near Roys store - helps to build community by teaching skills to people with physical or learning disabilities, and provides opportunities for volunteering.

The workshop is the main UK supplier of the acclaimed 'Godly Play' materials. The founder of Godly Play, Dr Jerome Berryman, says: "Children have an innate sense of the presence of God.



Paul Bale working with some of the wooden educational products.

Our approach helps them to explore their faith through stories, to enhance their spiritual experience through wonder and play."

The workshop's hand-made wooden products and creative educational resources are exported all over the world - and right now the workshop is working flat-out to meet orders and build up stocks for the national 'Godly Play' conference in London this April.

The project began in a double garage in 1984, moving to council premises in 1988 and its present purpose-

built workshop in 1993, next to Bowthorpe Church.

VIP guests, including the Lord Mayor of Norwich will attend the special Saturday celebration which will feature audio-visual displays of the work of the Bowthorpe Community Trust. The event will be opened by the Rev Simon Stokes, a blind patron of the workshop, and a former minister of Bowthorpe Church where the current minister is the Rev Mark Elvin.

For more information on the event, call Sally Simpson on 01603 746 106 or email: Bowthorpe.trust@gmail.com

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Youngsters chance for election debate

■ **NORWICH:** Young people from across Norfolk will be given the chance to put questions direct to General Election candidates at a special Big Election Debate to be held at the Open venue in Norwich on April 15, 6-8pm.

The event is a partnership between YMCA Norfolk, Map, The Benjamin Foundation, Break and the Open Youth Venue. The free-to-attend evening will be chaired by ITV journalist and news presenter Jonathan Wills.

Richard 'Toby' Coke (UKIP), Lesley Grahame (Greens), Norman Lamb (Liberal Democrats),

Clive Lewis (Labour) and Chloe Smith (Conservatives) will answer questions.

Tim Sweeting, Chief Executive of YMCA Norfolk, said: "We hope this will help encourage young people to be more politically active as they do not tend to vote at the same levels as other age categories and the aim is that they will feel more engaged and more likely to vote."

Free tickets at : <http://tinyurl.com/norfolk-bigdebate>

Keep up to date with the event #NorfolkBigDebate

Adoption opens new chapter for couple

When former missionaries, **Simon and Tania Davies** adopted two special needs siblings it opened a new chapter of blessing and joy. **Sandie Shirley** reports.

Despite sleepless nights and endless therapy, three-year-old Harley and younger sister Daisy are heaven sent. "They inspire love and have expanded our ability to love," says Simon. "We have also seen another side of love from our own teenage children who readily agreed to a new expanding family," says Tania, who trained as a nursery nurse and has worked with special needs' children.

She explains: "I have always been passionate about children and especially those with special needs. Three weeks after we married, and while working at a nursery, the fostering of two little boys broke down and I just wanted to bring them home."

Eighteen years later the couple are bringing new life and hope to two youngsters with learning difficulties that few wanted to adopt. "Most people want the perfect baby to enlarge or create their family," says Tania. The couple now want to join with other Christian adoptive parents or foster carers in Norfolk for mutual support and to help champion the vision in the local church of Christian charity, Home for Good, to see a home for every child who needs one.

The couple's mission of love followed their return from Andalusia after six years with the Spanish Gospel Mission. Tania was diagnosed and healed from Hodgkin lymphoma - a life-threatening cancer - while overseas and tells of a divine encounter while receiving her first dose of chemotherapy in hospital.

"I was listening to some worship songs and I felt the physical hand of God on my hand because when I opened my eyes there was no-one there."

Her faith received an immediate boost but the extra challenges finally took their toll on Simon. Burnt out and depressed from supporting his wife and caring for their children while preaching at four Spanish churches in a difficult spiritual environment, the couple returned to Norfolk seven years ago. Looking to God for the way forward, they moved to Mulbarton and joined the church, finding a community of love and care that helped re-build and re-envision their lives.

New direction came after reading about an



Simon and Tania Davies.

inspirational Christian musician who adopted three Chinese children. "I had been thinking of what we could give. We are not very well off so we could not give much money but we did have a family and a bit of space to give a child a loving secure home and there are plenty of children here in the UK that need homes," says school teacher Simon.

The couple began the long and gruelling adoption process, but after set-backs and disappointments their application was fast-tracked with a series of divine connections.

Harley was seven months old when he joined the family home and two year-old sister Daisy, who has vision impairment, followed at 10 months. The couple celebrate their birthdays and adoption days and in January Daisy and Harley met three of their siblings for the first time at a union party in Mulbarton.

Daily therapy and specialist help encourages their development but Tania is unafraid of the challenges: "I have worked with children who have autism and cerebral palsy which has given me experience and a network for

professional help. The intervening years have also been an adventure of faith, preparing us for the uncertainties that lie ahead and I feel God has something special for both of these children.

"A church thanksgiving service was held for Daisy and Harley and we continue to persevere and take them to Sunday services; it is wonderful to see the joy on everyone's faces when we arrive."

Says Simon: "It is not going to be easy but God has prepared these children for us and he will continue to give us strength and provision for a walk of faith."

He adds: "We would love to hear from other Christian adopters and foster carers in Norwich and Norfolk to create a support network, arrange informal gatherings and discuss ways to encourage churches to consider how they can support families to get involved in this important task under the umbrella of Home for Good."

Contact Simon at sim_davies@yahoo.co.uk or visit: www.homeforgood.org.uk



YMCA Sleep Easy supports the homeless

■ **NORWICH:** Over 50 supporters and residents from YMCA Norfolk braved the cold to sleep under the stars in Norwich overnight on March 7 to raise money for the Christian charity and its work with homeless young people across the county.

Groups from St Thomas church, the People's Picnic and Brown & Co estate agents and the YMCA Life Ready project in Yarmouth took part in the event in the grounds of Norwich High School for Girls.

Also taking part was Brian Hannah, chairman of Norfolk County Council, who said: "The work of the YMCA is quite incredible. I have seen first hand the work they do and the facilities they have to take young people in and give them a step on to improve their lives."

William Armstrong, Sheriff of Norwich, said: "We are aiming to raise funds but also raise awareness of a growing problem that really should scandalise us all - that there are youngsters in Norwich and Norfolk who are living rough, without shelter and who have been deprived of the basic right to a home. This is a matter of serious injustice and something that we should all address and face up to."

Video chance to showcase church

■ Norfolk churches are being offered the chance to participate in an exciting video project in collaboration with Celebrate Norfolk & Norfolk to help showcase the church in action across the county.

Following its successful introduction last year, Celebrate Norfolk, along with experienced local video producer Adam Jackson, is offering the opportunity to have a short video made of churches and Christian projects, with costs from £250. If you are interested contact Adam Jackson at hello@tomorrownight.com or visit www.celebratenorfolk.co.uk

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diary dates

■ **Norfolk and Norwich Healing Rooms Training** - 10am Saturday 28 March, House of Prayer, St Edmund's Church, Fishergate, Norwich. Bring your own lunch. To book place, contact Rev Ray Scorey on 07900 341 287, 01692 584 123 or rwscorey@aol.com

■ **Lent Quiet Day** - 10am Saturday 28 March, All Hallows Convent, Belsey Bridge Road, Ditchingham, Bungay, Suffolk. A preparation for Holy Week. This event includes talks and silence to help you reflect on the meaning of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

■ **Saturday Night at the Movies** - 6:30pm Saturday 28 March, Lighthouse, 62 Cromer Road, Sheringham. Family friendly event featuring songs from movies old and new. Live band and performers, featuring local young talent. Tickets: £6 per person on the door, £5 if purchased in advance, under 10s free. Contact: Ellen Waite on 01263 825155, or ewaite@lighthouseSheringham.org

■ **Holy Week and Easter retreat** - 10am Wednesday 1 April, All Hallows Convent, Belsey Bridge Road, Ditchingham, Bungay, Suffolk. Holy Week and Easter. Come for all or part of the time and share in our celebration of the "biggest" week in the Church's year. Book with Lavinia House on 01986 892840

■ **Individual Guided Retreat** - 10am Monday 20 April - Friday 24 April, All Hallows Convent, Belsey Bridge Road, Ditchingham, Bungay, Suffolk. During this silent retreat you are helped to take the next step on your spiritual journey under the guidance of a prayer guide. Residential to be held at Lavinia House. Numbers limited to 8, book early to avoid disappointment. Cost £220

■ **Art Exhibition at Trimmingham** - 11:00am 25-26 April, Church of St John the Baptist, Trimmingham. Art Exhibition of local artists work, all for sale, free admission. Details from Dot trimdot@yahoo.com or 01263 833249

■ **Take Heart** - 10am- 4pm, Saturday, 25 April, House of Prayer, Fishergate, Norwich, NR3 1SE. An opportunity to hear about a new project which Release Women is establishing in Egypt to help Christian women. Cost £5, For details contact House of Prayer on 01602 920074, email admin@calltoprayer.co.uk

■ **My Yoke is Easy Retreat** - 10am Saturday 2 May, All Hallows Convent, Belsey Bridge Road, Ditchingham, Bungay, Suffolk. A day exploring the nature of the burdens we are carrying and ways of coming to God to lay them down

■ **Music on a Spring Evening Concert**, 7pm Friday 22 May, Heydon Church, off the B1149 Norwich to Holt road, Tickets £7 payable at the door. Concert given by the "Crickets" a 10-strong mixed ensemble of Sixth form singers from Gresham's school. Interval wine, soft drinks and finger food included in the ticket price. Funds for restoration of historic organ in the church.



Business-woman Sarah Hart with some of her tiaras

Tiaras from the creator's heart

The Barnham Broom business-woman, who produces hand-made bespoke tiaras for brides, also invests in people's marriages with husband Alan.

When the couple 'tied the knot' Sarah became the answer to Alan's late wife's dying wish when she lost her fight against cancer at just 31. "She wanted him to marry a good woman and have the children that she could not give him," says the 41 year-old who celebrates her tenth wedding anniversary in July.

"Marriage is from God and it needs to be nurtured and if God is happy with the marriage you cannot go wrong?" says Sarah who has seen her creator rebuild her life after divorce with a new life partner and two young children.

"When I focus on the tiaras I make, I see God shining through because he has restored my life and made me shine from when life seemed so bleak."

Sarah launched Hartfelt Tiaras from home last summer and also makes fascinators while using her hairdressing skills to dress bridal hair. Without training, she lovingly

Sarah Hart loves romance and weddings and is passionate about marriage after finding love again after heartache and disappointment. Sandie Shirley reports.

constructs intricate wire tiaras with freshwater pearls and Swarovski crystals. Each work of art denotes the bride's personality and wedding theme and comes in a gift box, explains Sarah who donated a tiara to last year's Wymondham carnival queen.

"My work is a perfect combination that enables me to be creative and have time for Alan and our two young children," says Sarah.

She found her Saviour Jesus when she was just nine and was baptised with her two sisters five years later. She grew up with the nurture and love of Christian parents who were farmers. "But as a little girl I had a massive delight for weddings and confetti and I

was thrilled by hair and creating," says Sarah, who has been in the hairdressing industry for 25 years.

During her early career tragedy struck when her two-year marriage ended. Vulnerable and hurting, her faith took a back seat as she looked for happiness elsewhere.

"I was in love with the idea of being in love and I was looking for love and a new spouse. Eventually I realised I needed to get my faith back on track because I could not live without God and I left my future in his hands," says Sarah who met widower Alan seven years later and who has been "a healing touch from God with his kind and caring ways."

The couple, who help run a Biblical marriage course, now live an abundant life and since joining Hope Community Church, Wymondham they have found a new and lasting identity.

"My life has burst into bloom and I soar on the thermals of God's love like the eagle," says Sarah who is part of the worship team and prays for hurting people.

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Pictured above are Congolese children singing with instruments.

Maureen returns to Congo after 30 years

Maureen Lee, a former Christian missionary, now in her 70s and living in **Norfolk**, says it was "a great thrill" to fly back to the **Democratic Republic of Congo** in central Africa recently, where she worked as a teacher, 30 years ago. **Mike Wiltshire** reports.

Some of my former students are now grandparents," says Maureen, who taught in the French-speaking nation for 12 years and was known to them as Mademoiselle Lee. Some students who learned English, called her 'Miss Lee' - a term so popular that one young couple affectionately named their baby daughter, 'Misslee'.

Armed with insect repellent - and bearing gifts - Maureen's action-packed two-month trip included ministry in Congolese prisons and broadcasting in French on radio and TV. Highlights of her journey included seeing the work of Christian evangelists who, with the help of 100 bicycles, have planted 300 village churches.

Today Maureen is an active member of Taverham Evangelical Church, and a trustee of CAM International (formerly the Central African Mission), founded exactly 100 years ago by UK Pentecostal pioneers, Willie Burton and James Salter.

Hundreds of missionaries followed them, and today there are thousands of Bible-believing churches in the DR Congo with "marvellous opportunities for the Gospel - many people are becoming Christians," says Maureen, who first felt God's call to the mission field at the age of 13.

However, many areas of the mineral-rich Congo struggle with unrest, widespread poverty, corruption and the fall-out of regional wars for many years.



Former missionary Maureen Lee.

Literacy in some areas has gone backwards and many dedicated teachers are unpaid, just "working for love".

Historians estimate that by 2008, 5.4 million people were killed in the 'Second Congo War' - mostly by disease and starvation, making it the deadliest conflict worldwide since World War Two.

Nevertheless, Christian outreach today is growing.

Maureen, who has long pastoral experience with the Assemblies of God, which has nearly 600 churches in the UK, agrees that her optimism and sense of humour has "carried her through" many challenges in Christian work at home and abroad. "But the joy of the Lord is our strength," says Maureen, with a smile - adding she "can't rule out yet another trip back to central Africa one day."

Dereham Town Pastors launched

■ **DEREHAM:** Over 40 representatives of town and district councils, local churches and youth organisations from across Mid Norfolk attended the official launch and signing ceremony for the Dereham Town Pastors initiative on March 4.

The culmination of many hours of work and prayer were rewarded at Dereham Baptist Church in a simple yet inspiring and exciting ceremony. Dereham became the first Norfolk town to be affiliated with the Suffolk umbrella organisation Town Pastors.

Tim Birt, the Mayor of Dereham, welcomed the formation of the Dereham Town Pastors.

The local Police Community Support Officer, speaking on behalf of his senior officers, echoed the Mayor's comments and welcomed the help and co-operation given to the police by the Town Pastors, and being available to young people in their own environment enabled them to seek help and guidance outside of official channels.

The initiative started last summer when a group of people from churches in the town met and formed a committee with the aim of bringing Town Pastors to the streets of Dereham and the surrounding villages.

Dereham Town Pastors adheres to the core values and code of practice of the Suffolk Town Pastor organisation, but is an entirely separate and independent charitable body.

Recruiting for street patrols and prayer teams will commence during March. Patrols act as a positive presence on the streets, to dissuade anti-social behaviour and provide a calming influence in tense and volatile situations and providing safety and reassurance to school students and local residents.

The police have advised that the most beneficial times for patrols to go out would be between 4pm and 6pm and 8pm and 10pm on Fridays initially. Patrols would include a variety of locations around the town, wherever the young people congregate including the town centre, various car parks and the Recreation ground.

For more details visit Dereham Town Pastors website at: www.derehamtownpastors.org.uk

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Speaking words of faith in India

■ While in India, Simon gave away handmade 'holding crosses', all made in Bowthorpe, to newly ordained ministers. Simon is an enthusiastic patron of St Michael's Workshop which this year celebrates 30 years of pioneer community service. Before moving to Sprowston, Simon was minister of the adjacent Bowthorpe Church. (See story on page 8).



A Norfolk church minister who is just back from a third mission trip to India, will never forget the day when he prayed for hundreds of village people. Among them was a mute child who spoke for the first time after being prayed for by **Rev Canon Simon Stokes** - who is registered blind. **Mike Wiltshire** reports.

This healing incident had a profound effect on Simon, vicar of Sprowston for the past three years.

Simon was exhausted on the day he prayed for hundreds of eager villagers in Tamil Nadu, the populous state in south-east India renowned for its 34,000 Hindu temples and sacred sites.

After sharing the Gospel message several times for up to an hour, and then praying for vast crowds of people for three hours after the services, Simon admits he "really longed for a cup of tea" - and was startled when his interpreter assured him that the once-mute child who had not spoken before, was now speaking.

"It certainly wasn't my faith. I can't boast about it," says Simon. "I was humbled and out of my comfort zone. People there in rural India are just so expectant that something will happen when you pray."

"In those villages, it's often a 'life or death' thing . . . if God does not intervene in a miraculous way, who will?"

"Because I can't see, I was completely reliant on the translator to tell me what was happening - you never knew who was coming forward for prayer."

Simon, 52, who is on a well-earned sabbatical break, is known for his many remarkable adventures, despite being registered blind since he was 24. Even as a child of five his eye-sight was failing - but he went on to become an accountant and has two university degrees.

His adventures for charity include jumping out of a plane; sailing as a bosun's mate on a tall ship across the Atlantic, climbing 130 feet



Canon Simon Stokes with guide dog, Hope

above deck to work on a yard-arm; running numerous marathons and completing a leg of the Olympic Torch relay in Norwich city centre.

Very recently he was on a two-week walk and camping trip with a friend round the blustery North Norfolk coast - "that put me right out of my comfort zone!" admits Simon.

His other incredible achievements have included missionary work in Nepal, Namibia and India, and serving as a minister of three different parishes and a member of the General Synod.

'Hope', his third guide dog, is also a lively national celebrity at the age of two-and-a-half, having been featured on the cover of the Christmas guide dogs' fundraising campaign.

Simon's former faithful guide dog, the very intuitive 'Tigger', is still part of the family but doesn't like being retired, says Simon.

However, Tigger "literally goes to school once a week", offering "Tigger Time" to Bowthorpe children who benefit from reading to her "as a non-critical friend" - thus boosting the children's reading confidence. Tigger wins

over even the most reluctant readers.

Simon and his wife, Christine, a teacher, have three children: James, 23, and just engaged; Matthew 21, and Mary, 19.

Simon's adventures have at times "pushed him to the limit", though as a deeply spiritual man he says he is beginning to accept the limitations of sight-loss "and embracing what God is using that [disability] for."

Simon hopes to run the Beachy Head marathon again this year to help raise £6,000 to build a strategically-located Christian church - in a needy area of Tamil Nadu.

"We've bought the land after three years, and are now ready to build. From the first time I went to India six years ago, I just fell in love with the Christian work there," he said.

The new church project supported by Simon is one of five new churches in Tamil Nadu which are being supported by Christians in East Anglia.

Readers who would like to support the project can call Simon on 01603 411194 or email him at: vicar@sprowston.org.uk

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