

GOOD NEWS

FOR NORWICH & NORFOLK

Spring 2017: FREE

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■ The dramatic story of Easter is set to be acted out on the normally quiet streets of the East Norfolk village of Reedham on Good Friday, April 14, for the first ever time.

A 100-strong team is behind the Passion Play which will be staged in five outdoor locations, including a school and a farm.

Reedham associate priest, Rev Lorna Allies, said: "A team of dedicated amateurs will be telling the Easter story of the days leading up to the death of Jesus Christ, a story well-known to Christians everywhere, but acted out in a dramatic way through the streets of our quiet village.

"Usually given as readings within churches, we have chosen to bring the sequence of events out into the community as a play, so that we can retell the story dramatically for everyone.

"A Reedham church member first had the idea, and it took shape last spring as two people involved in church activities were chatting over a cup of coffee in the sunshine. From that small beginning it has grown into a team of nearly 100 people.

"In assembling this group we have been amazed at the talent lying hidden in our community and in the local villages. We have a retired cathedral organist and composer in charge of the music, a retired costume designer making most of the costumes, a boat-builder and two engineers building the cross, a theatrical agency director in charge of the production, and many more," said Lorna.

The day starts at 12 noon with refreshments at Reedham Village Hall, where there is ample free parking. The audience then walk, or take the free minibus to Reedham Primary School, where the action really begins at 1.30pm with Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem.

Subsequent scenes take place within easy walking distance, ending with the crucifixion in Ferry farmyard on Station Road. The play will be over by about 3pm, when people can walk or ride back to the Village Hall for teas and coffees.

Everyone is welcome. There is no charge, but donations welcome for East Anglian Air Ambulance.



Passion play set for streets of Norfolk village

A scene from the Reedham Passion Play with Jesus, played by John Mules, carrying the cross. Picture by James Bass.

Ex-teenage rebel and mission nurse is 100

A former teenage rebel, who later became a pioneer missionary nurse in **China and Malaysia**, has just celebrated her 100th birthday in **Norfolk**. **Mike Wiltshire** reports.

“I was a rebel and a tom-boy, expelled from two schools,” recalls Mary Welander, who admits she was once “a menace to family and friends,” until she surprised everyone by becoming a convinced Christian at the age of 15. She went on to

give a lifetime of heroic service to countless numbers of people in China, Malaysia and the UK.

Mary now lives at Eckling Grange, the Christian residential care home in Dereham. As a very sprightly 100-year-old, she says: “I don’t even use a wheelchair at home yet!”

Mary is modest about her experiences, but they are remarkable: she has faced near-death in the Chinese revolution, “lived by faith” and laboured on amid terrorism in South-East Asia, delivered babies as a midwife, learned to pull out hundreds of decaying teeth, confronted a 21ft python, ministered to Chinese lepers, started prayer meetings, established churches, pioneered literature evangelism and Bible

courses in nine countries, written life-changing books and, after 27 years in the tropics, moved back to the UK to encourage Christian work in the east of England.

Born on the family farm on Dartmoor on March 13, 1917, Mary is the daughter of a Swedish engineer, Sven Welander, and a devout English mother, Georgina.

Mary’s life was transformed after she came to faith in a profound conversion in 1932; “There was a new love and loyalty surging through my heart...,” she said. “The sun had begun to shine, especially on the first Easter after my conversion, when, reading the resurrection story, I felt the

■ Continues on page 10



Mary Welander.

NORFOLK
FEEDS 5000

Does church across Norfolk obey the command of Jesus?

■ There has been a great response to the launch of the Norfolk Feeds 5000 project with over 90 responses.

The research project aims to try and establish the extent to which the Christian community across Norfolk is obeying the simple command of Jesus to “feed the hungry”.

It has received details of scores of projects run by Christian churches, groups and organisations across Norfolk which help feed the hungry every day of the year through foodbanks, free community meals, homeless projects, soup runs, Messy Church and other activities.

The full results and individual project reports will be published online on a new website and in a social media campaign **#norfolkfeeds5000**.

They will also be published in the special Celebrate Norwich & Norfolk edition of Good News for Norwich, due out in early May.

www.norfolkfeeds5000.co.uk

GOOD NEWS

FOR NORWICH & NORFOLK

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■ The deadline for material for the Celebrate edition is Friday April 21. Distribution is from Thursday May 11.

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Comfort in the Good Friday moments of life

■ I'll be honest with you – life feels pretty hard at the moment! With all that has happened in Britain and around the world over the last eight months or so, the general sense of optimism that has accompanied me faithfully through my life, feels to have been a somewhat eroded. And my, maybe childish, faith in the belief that 'people' will make choices that, broadly speaking, I feel are good and right has most definitely had to grow up.

Alongside that I have been faced with some situations in my life as a parish priest that could definitely be described as 'testing'. Moments where, even given my best efforts, I can't offer the care and comfort that I would want to do. All in all it feels as if this period in my life could be described as an ongoing Good Friday time. I am sure we all have them, maybe you too are feeling a little as I am at the moment.

As I write, we are making our Lenten journey and our annual remembering of the Passion of Christ lies ahead. I am reminded that Easter is the time in the Christian year when we, over the course of one week, get to relive pretty much every emotion it is possible for a human being to experience. From the elation and near hysteria of the entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, to the solidarity and friendship of the last supper, the betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane, the terror and injustice of the arrest, the shame of the trial, the pain and separation of Good Friday, to the

South Norfolk priest, Rev Suzanne Cooke, reflects on the hope of Easter.

indescribable joy of Easter Sunday.

Each step on the journey of Easter week could be described as the distillation of the human condition, with its tidal wave of feelings and emotions, the sometimes overwhelming consequence of being human, of having five senses and a conscience. With that comes the inescapable fact that pain is unavoidable. The pain, distress and desolation of Good Friday is unavoidable.

We are often told aren't we, and we may or may not have a sense that this is true, that without the pain and betrayal of Good Friday we couldn't have the joy and elation of the empty tomb on Easter Sunday. I believe this to be undeniably true. But I will be honest and say that this isn't what gives me comfort in the Good Friday moments of my life. I know and understand that Jesus had to die, to defeat, for all time, the effects of my sin and that without this intervening act, my salvation, my irreversibly changed relationship with God, is not possible.

But this, rightly or wrongly, is not what fills me with a sense of Hope in the darkest moments of my life. My sense of hope is motivated far more

by what I think Paul means when he writes; "Hope does not disappoint us because God's love had been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." (Rom 5:5) So what keeps me hoping, what helps me keeps focused when things get tough, is that most inescapable of things – the unrelenting love of God for me – for each and every one of us.

I have faith in the connection between hope and love, and it is this that helps me see past the darkness of the inevitable Good Friday moments of life. For when I can sense, in the deepest part of my heart, that I am loved eternally, unconditionally, for all time, by God, the creator of all things – then I can truly begin to lift my head and see beyond what is happening in this moment. I can begin to see that, despite what might appear to 'be' in the here and now, we are all being drawn forward, by the unstoppable force that is the immeasurable love shown to us in the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

All of us, Christian sisters and brothers, being drawn forward to live the life that shouts YES with our whole being. And in living that life we sow seeds, we may not know how or where, living as we do in the midst of the difficulties of the present time, but in the future that we cannot see or currently comprehend are the planted the seeds of renewal, planted by our hoping, planted with our love, that will come to bear the choicest of fruits.

Life-changing project

Karaoke, Royal reminiscences and a sensory garden are just some of the activities on offer at a Norwich day centre for the elderly which has "changed the life" of at least one attendee.

The Lakenham Day Centre and twice-weekly Luncheon Club, is based at the New Hope Christian Centre on Martineau Lane in Lakenham, and has had a significant impact on some of its regulars according to Texan-born manager Duane Elkins.

"Pauline, who has early dementia, loves coming to the centre," he said. "She gets involved in the activities based around cognitive stimulation therapy, comes on the outings and at Christmas told me that 'the club has changed her life and is the best thing that has happened to her for a long time'."

"David one of the gentleman who attends, took part in the cookery group and made some bread. He said to me: 'This is the most useful thing I have done in two years'. The next week he brought in a cake he had made at home for others to enjoy with their coffee."

Such is the impact of the centre for the over 55s which, unusually, has almost as many gentlemen attending as ladies.

The morning activities include a card table, a scrabble table and magazines and newspapers to browse. Others just like to sit and chat. Endless cups of tea, coffee and biscuits are available free of charge.

"Last year we secured funding to develop a Sensory Garden which has provided a beautiful outdoor space for members to sit and have coffee and a chat during the summer months," said Duane. "This is part of our dementia-friendly work, as we have several members who are coping with memory difficulties."



David making bread with volunteer Tonia at the Lakenham Day Centre.

"Dinners are 'home cooked' on the premises and fresh seasonal ingredients are sourced locally where possible. There is always an alternative menu available for those who have special dietary needs or those who don't like certain foods," said Duane.

Afternoon activities range from reminiscence sessions to special interest talks. "One of the most fascinating was given by a man who worked in Buckingham Palace as an assistant controller of the household," said Duane. "Another was how to travel Norfolk using a bus

pass. We have recently bought a karaoke machine which has become a firm favourite and is always accompanied by much laughter."

As an extension of the day centre's work it also runs a student placement scheme, for volunteers who wish to gain basic skills and experience to support them access employment. Since the scheme started six students have gained part time employment in the Norwich area.

A Big Lottery fund has made much of this work possible.

The day centre is part of the work of Community Action Norwich and you can find out more from Vanessa or Duane on 01603 617771 or visit www.communityactionnorwich.co.uk



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THORNTONS CHOCOLATES

Football-mad duo are club chaplains

Rev Bert Cadmore, left, and pastor Jon Norman at Norwich City's Colney training ground.

Sporting night

■ On Sunday April 2, Soul Church has an evening with Sky sports presenter and Norwich City fan Simon Thomas, talking all things football, family and faith. They will also honour Norwich City Club Chaplain Rev Bert Cadmore for his 15 years of service. All are welcome from 5pm at Soul Church, Mason Road, Norwich.

Two football-loving Norfolk church ministers, who shout for their team from the stands at **Carrow Road** at every home match, also offer their support in a quieter way at **Norwich City's Colney training ground** as the club's chaplains. **Keith Morris reports.**

Rev Albert (Bert) Cadmore and pastor Jon Norman share a love of people, a love of football and a love of Norwich City.

Both were decent amateur goalkeepers in their younger days, but now they mostly continue their love of the beautiful game in full voice as season ticket holders at Carrow Road on match days. But they also offer a more personal level of support to their favourite team at the Colney training ground near Norwich as official club chaplains.

Non-stipendiary Anglican church minister, Bert, has been in the role for 15 years. He was joined by Norwich Soul Church pastor, Jon, a couple of years ago after he returned to his home city of Norwich after training as a church minister at Hillsong Leadership College in Sydney, Australia, and then being part of the pastoral team of Hillsong Church, Cape Town, attracting 12,000 people each Sunday.

Bert, who was a goalkeeper for Gorleston FC, and other local teams, said: "For me the role is

about providing a supportive friendship and of just being there for the players and for everyone else, being a presence and hoping that does something for the ethos of the place.

"Our focus is at the training ground rather than at the stadium," said Bert. "Chaplaincy is a resource for the club to use as it wishes. We are known throughout the club but you can only really get to know a certain number of people."

Jon said: "I see our role as encouragers. Whether it is the young guy who has broken his leg in the youth team or a senior player who is struggling to break into the first team – we are encouragers – in the Barnabas role, for the good and the bad times.

"In chaplaincy you just never know what will come around the corner – you just look at the recent Brazilian football team plane crash. If a player loses a parent or their daughter is sick we are here to provide support if it is wanted."

Bert added: "We are also there to celebrate the good as well as in hard times. We love it of course when our team is successful, but we are there for people. We are there for when people are ill or when they are bereaved."

Bert has long-standing relationships with a number of ex-players. He has conducted baptisms for children of staff when requested and also funerals for former players.

A teacher for most of his career before training as a priest, Bert said: "The hardest thing is that by the very nature of the industry people come and people go. Players cope with it as they know that is the industry they are in.

"You just get to know somebody and then they are sold and leave," said Jon. "Watching all

the youth team players that are let go at the end of each season is also hard. But we just love working with people, helping them, encouraging them, supporting them."

Sports chaplaincy has really grown since the turn of the millennium, especially in professional football with the growth of academies and the need for pastoral care stated in their charter – around 70 of the 92 Football League clubs now have chaplains.

It was Sammy Morgan, the first Norwich City academy director, who brought Bert into the club. Bert played alongside Sammy before he went into the professional game.

Bert is also a trustee of growing national Sports Chaplaincy UK network which has over 350 chaplains in a variety of sports – also including rugby union and league, tennis and even a horse racing chaplain in Newmarket. He is also chaplain at Gorleston FC, for the Norfolk and Suffolk Youth League and involved with the Norfolk Christian Football League and particularly his team UEA Rovers.

The duo are usually at Colney every Wednesday and often mix with players and staff in the cafeteria. Bert will be retiring from his role at the end of the season but Jon will be continuing the role. Jon said: "Everything at the football club is focused on body and mind, whereas we offer a focus on the other dimension, which is soul. We don't push it but if we are asked we can tell them about our faith or church. But that is not the primary reason we are here."

Bert summed up the role very concisely: "We are men of faith who love football and love people." Enough said.



Chance for choirs to join Celebrate

■ Church and church-run community choirs are being invited to take part in the Celebrate Norwich & Norfolk event outside the Forum in Norwich city centre on Saturday June 10.

Last year, a joint choir successfully came together to take part in the event. This year, individual church and church-run community choirs are being invited to take part.

Organiser Hannah Emmrich, Music Director at St Stephen's Church, said: "We are inviting choirs to come and sing outside the Forum, on Millennium Plain. All standards and styles are welcome – it's a great chance to bring out some of your favourite songs, liven up the celebrations and hear other choirs in the city."

There will be a keyboard and small sound system available.

If you'd like your choir to be involved, or would like more information, email hannah.emmrich@gmail.com

Distribution changes

■ The Good News newspaper has a new distribution co-ordinator following the retirement of Les Champion after seven years of service. Val Dodsworth will lead a team from the House of Genesis taking on the distribution role from the next edition onwards. You can contact Val at v.dodsworth@ntlworld.com or on (01603) 945897.

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Ex soldier takes on highest mountain

■ A Norwich-based former soldier, who ended up homeless on the streets of London, is now preparing to climb the highest mountain in Africa to raise money for development charity Christian Aid.

Marcus Kilpatrick joined the Army at the age of 17 and served in the Royal Mechanical Engineers for over 12 years including tours in Afghanistan and Northern Ireland.

"When I left the army I basically hit rock bottom," said Marcus. "I found myself homeless and living in a car in London. My story was in a national newspaper and a kind stranger offered me a room until I got myself up again. I eventually got a job and found my dignity again."

"I came back to Norwich, got married and became a Christian. I now attend Norwich Central Baptist Church. Of course I still have challenges but life is so much better with the support of my wife, my church and God."

Marcus, who now works as a mechanic in Norwich, said: "I want to give something back and help those who have so little in our world. I am going to climb Mount Kilimanjaro which is the highest free-standing mountain in the world - at 15,100 feet high. It will be a real challenge. If you want to join in and make a difference to those who have least then please do sponsor me, I'd be happy to talk at your church too."

Marcus is hoping to raise £10,000 with his climb in September and can be sponsored at: <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/Marcus-Kilpatrick>

Elvis 'Priestley' makes return to Norwich

Andy Kelso, a former Anglican vicar in **Norwich** who hit the national headlines with his unique **Elvis Presley** tribute act, will be back in the city on Saturday, May 20, with "the very best of Elvis with rock, ballad and gospel songs." **Mike Wiltshire** reports.

Andy's own story is remarkable in that he survived a near-fatal 75mph motorcycle accident at 19 which caused him to pray for the first time in his life.

Later, Andy trained as an actor and ran his own theatre company, putting on London shows. Then he felt the call to train for Christian ministry and was a vicar for 25 years, mainly in tough council estates. For four years he ministered at Hellesdon where he took over a rundown church and slowly built it up to be a vibrant fellowship.

Today, father-of-five Andy, lives in Worcester where he was Chaplain to Worcester Warriors Rugby Club. His Cornish-born wife, Charm, is a clinical nurse specialising in palliative care.

Looking forward to his Norwich show in May, Andy says: "I want everyone to have a great evening enjoying the best of Elvis - and hopefully dancing! I'm able to share a little of Elvis' journey in between songs and also share how some of his journey and mine were the same. It will definitely be a night to remember!"

After Yorkshire-born Andy retired from parish ministry in 2009, he prayed for 15 months for God's direction as he walked his dogs in the woods and fields. "Out of the blue, I felt God say, 'Take Elvis to the churches.'"

Andy, a gifted singer, admits he was "terrified" but leaders and friends at his last church encouraged him to put on a packed-out launch concert in 2011. He was amazed by the positive response - "it's been amazing and very humbling."

Since then he has been all over the UK - "it's been a thrilling journey to connect with those who normally never go to church!"

He finds the Gospel songs "really touch



Andy Kelso as Elvis Presley.

hearts" as he weaves in stories about his own troubled childhood and teenage years.

"I think people don't realise that Elvis loved his gospel songs so much. My whole desire is to build bridges with people and Elvis, I believe, is a fantastic link."

"When you listen to Elvis' gospel songs, they're just so from-the-heart and they really seem to speak to people. It's true that for many years he went far away from his Christian roots but he never stopped believing the basics of Christianity."

Andy, who has been dubbed 'Elvis Priestley' in newspaper headlines, will be appearing at The Talk entertainment centre on Oak Street, Norwich, NR3 6BP.

The nostalgic nightspot is well-known as the former "Talk of the East" and over six decades has featured bands such as Bill Haley and the Comets, The Who and Status Quo, plus artists such as Rod Stewart and Eric Clapton. Cabaret stars including Bob Monkhouse, Leslie Crowther, Arthur Askey and Dickie Henderson.

Describing his show, Andy Kelso sees it "as a form of reaching out to people, using the king of rock 'n' roll to introduce people to Jesus, hopefully in a way that will be fun."

Elvis was the best-selling solo artist in the history of recorded music, with sales of 600 million albums, but his three Grammy Awards

were all for Gospel music. In his last live performance, Elvis sang his award-winning version of the classic hymn, How Great Thou Art.

Recalling his time in Norwich as a minister, Andy says: "I was priest-in-charge at St Michael's Hellesdon, in the Marlpit from 1987 to 1990."

One of the ways I reached out to people was to form a football team which was FA affiliated and we had some Christian young men and a lot of non-Christians. We called ourselves Hellesdon Angels!

"That first season we didn't win one game! So I challenged them to get fit with me over the summer because some wag had put a bottle of champagne on my doorstep only to be opened when we won a game!"

"We started to win and never looked back and many joined the church!"

Tickets for Andy's Elvis tribute at The Talk, Norwich, are available in advance at £10 (or £12.50 on the door) from Barrie Lawrence on 01603 898 289 or via email to barrielawrence@btinternet.com

Refreshments are available at the event which will also feature Trevor Hurn's popular Drivetime Disco.

"This is a new type of venture for us and all visitors are welcome - it will be a great evening," says Barrie Lawrence.

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A woman of action: Marguerite Phillips

Marguerite puts faith into action

Faith in action is a principle the **Mothers' Union** in **Norwich** lives by, as ably demonstrated by **Marguerite Phillips**, whose role as president has seen her campaigning for many causes, including Norfolk to provide sanctuary for Syrian refugees. **Helen Baldry** reports.

A compassion for refugees is something Marguerite grew up with. She has always enjoyed meeting people from other countries and has many friends of different nationalities. She was a teacher of modern languages at The Norwich School, has lived in Germany and has family members from overseas. She said: "Meeting people from all across Europe opens your eyes."

The most depressed Marguerite has felt in relation to politics was after the Brexit vote – she said: "I felt like we are shutting the door on people."

Marguerite admires Angela Merkel's humanitarian response to refugees. She said: "I take my hat off to her – she set a fine example."

Members of the Mothers' Union in Norfolk prepared for the recent arrival

of Syrian refugees to Norwich for many weeks by collecting household items and purchasing new bedding for their accommodation. They made up the beds and prepared the homes of the new arrivals to ensure they felt truly welcomed to their new city.

Marguerite, and her husband Peter, attend St Mark's church in Lakenham. They have two children and three grandchildren. She loves gardening and singing and is a busy, active person who finds joy in helping people – and her mission to do so has led her on unexpected adventures.

Marguerite describes herself as a shy person who would have never considered being involved in demonstrations, yet she felt compelled to speak up in favour of Norfolk taking the refugees it had the resources for and found the campaign experience a positive one. She believes a key thing was that the action was underpinned by prayer.

It can be a challenge to snatch time to pray. Marguerite often prays when she is online, prompted by a quote or a prayer, particularly the prayers shared on the Mothers' Union Facebook page.

She is grateful for all the encouragement she has received from people, including the Mothers' Union members who continually pray for her. She said: "I can't do it on my own."

As president, Marguerite has developed lots of partnerships, including with Sanctuary Norfolk – a group of people of different backgrounds and faiths. She describes her involvement as

"a wonderful eye-opener" and has found a lot in common and they were able to worship together.

Marguerite has learnt to be persistent. When she was lobbying for the Loving for Life marriage course to be backed at Westminster, she was advised by Jan McFarlane, who was Archdeacon of Norwich at the time, to "stick your foot in the door, and keep pushing!", a lesson she has taken to heart. Marguerite said: "I have to carry out my faith through action. I try to follow the example of Christ and be compassionate. Sometime you have to take risks... the worst that can happen is you fall flat on your face!"

As a Christian growing up in a small Yorkshire village, going to church was a habit instilled in Marguerite from a young age. Her uncle was a vicar and Marguerite spent a lot of time as a child in his vicarage and has experienced a variety of church styles over the years.

She loves worshipping through song and enjoys spending time in the chapel at Norwich Cathedral – Mothers Union meet there to pray on the first Thursday of the month. She marvels at how you can see something new there every time.

While Mothers' Union membership is dwindling in the UK, it is growing rapidly overseas, particularly in Africa and other countries across the world where women are motivated by literacy and the status it gives them and the support of belonging to a women's group.

Norwich refugee charity celebrates decade of work

■ A Norwich educational charity, set up in memory of a Norwich Anglican priest, to support students from a Palestinian refugee camp is marking its tenth anniversary and has just become an independent charity.

The John Aves Education Project (JAEP) was set up in 2007 in memory of Norwich priest, Rev Canon Dr John Aves, who was living and working in the Dheisheh refugee camp at Bethlehem in Palestine at the time of his death in January 2004.

Over the last decade the charity has raised over £109,000 and has now financially supported 22 young people from the refugee camp to attend Al Quds University.

Last November the Trust became an independent charity. It came under the auspices of YMCA Norfolk until that time.

John's wife Anne, who is chair of the charity, thanked supporters, saying: "It's so encouraging how the project is developing and how the support for our work is steadily growing. Thank you very much for your part in all of this, it is very much appreciated by us and of course the young people of Dheisheh Camp."

"I am currently planning my 2017 trip to Dheisheh and Al Quds University. I'm really looking forward to being joined on this visit by two or three others, drawn from the Norwich Cathedral community and clergy in the diocese. We will stay at both Dheisheh Refugee Camp in Bethlehem and Al Quds University in East Jerusalem. We will join the students in their classes, meet university tutors, and spend time with the families of the young people thereby enabling us to deepen our understanding of the situation there."

On May 19, JAEP supporters are invited to attend the 5.30pm evensong at Norwich Cathedral to be followed by a reception with refreshments in the Hostry. Patron Bishop Graham will be there to celebrate ten years of JAEP and becoming an independent charity.

The Trust seeks to empower disadvantaged young people to fulfil their potential through educational achievement in order for them to better serve their community.

Before his death, John wrote from the refugee camp: "This centre is run by some of the many Palestinians who are placing their hopes in educating their children in dance groups, in self-confidence and language skills and computer technology to carry on the long-term struggle with dignity and grace."

www.jaep.org.uk



Anne Aves with some of the young people JAEP has been able to help at Al Quds University

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Church's international vision

A hidden Norwich church has an international vision for promoting Christian heritage and especially the key role of the Puritans. **Kevin Gotts** reports.

■ Just a short walk from Norwich city centre, close to the River Wensum is The Old Meeting House Congregational Church, built in Colegate in 1693. This originated from the Puritans where meeting houses were plain buildings where "church meets".

The building was of enormous significance at that time, as it marked the end of the fathers who founded the Old Meeting House Church from having to meet and worship in secret.

Dr John Clements, the current minister, and a close group of loyal supporters, have been busy putting on a programme of services and events for those who wish to better understand the Puritan faith and those who want to understand the historical importance of Oliver Cromwell and other Puritans who were associated with the chapel. The members of the church welcome both local and international visitors to learn from, enjoy and use its facilities.

The building and its history are considered important to the city of Norwich and to the Congregational Church, which has a worldwide membership of over 2.4 million. The early non-conformists in Norwich played a significant role in laying the spiritual foundation for the Church in the United States of America. Architecturally, the building is of special



Dr John Clements outside the Old Meeting House Congregational Church. www.oldmeetinghousechurch.org.uk

interest as the first important example of Free Church architecture with, reportedly, the first building in Norwich to have had sash-windows.

"It is hoped that the chapel will become a national centre for promoting the Christian Heritage of the UK," said John of his vision for the church. "Apart from the unique historical setting of the chapel, we have other rooms for talks and discussion groups and to provide catering for visitors. For example we have a series of talks monthly entitled 'Light from Old Paths' running from January to June 2017, with eminent speakers," he said.

In early March a day conference 'Delighting in God and His Word', with Prof Dr Michael Haykin from the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, was staged.

In addition, there are regular services, "Sing on Saturday" on the third Saturday of the month at 3pm. It is a time to

sing the old hymns that many churches no longer sing, accompanied by the organ which was built in 1660. There is no sermon, but John shares a little background about how the hymns came to be written and often unpacks some of their meaning.

John is excited by the increasing international revival of interest in the Puritans: "We seek to provide an internationally recognised tourist environment focus based on faith with its roots established in and around Norwich and Norfolk which will, of course, bring further economic benefits to our fine city."

Besides being an acclaimed writer, blogger and church historian, John is actively promoting Christian unity and extends a warm welcome to the leaders of Norwich churches to join with him for occasional times of refreshment and prayer. He welcomes others who wish to find out more, to get in touch.

Betrayal, ad prison are in

After years of betrayal, addiction and prison, former **Big Issue** seller and now **Norwich Salvation Army** member **Mark Parkinson** tells **Rosemary Dawson** about his new life.

From alcohol and drug addictions to prison and homelessness, life has been a constant struggle for Mark Parkinson.

His difficulties started early. At the age of 18 months, he was taken from his home in Wisbech by his mother and a man he grew up thinking was his father. They took him to Cornwall.

"Although my real dad tried to find me, I didn't meet him again for 39 years," says Mark.

"I was too young to remember him. This other man told me that he was my father and abused me. My mum wasn't on the scene much as they split up fairly quickly. He also told me she had died, which wasn't true.

"I started running away from home when I was ten. I was put into care and foster homes, and ran away from all of them. I hated living in Cornwall, and at 15 I hitched a lift to London. It was winter, and the only clothes I had were what I was wearing – shorts, T-shirt and trainers."

Mark stole food to survive. "One day, a policeman saw me coming out of a garage with a load of pies and stopped me. The garage man knew I had taken them – I'd been in there before – but didn't press charges, which was nice of him.

"By 16, I was well into drugs and alcohol. I soon got into trouble with the law for petty crime to support my habits, and had several stays at young offender institutions.

"I was living with the Jesus Army community in Northampton when I got a phone call from a woman saying she was my mother.

"I thought: 'That can't be right, she's dead.' Eventually, she managed to convince me of her identity. I still don't know how she found me.

"As if that wasn't enough of a shock, she also told me that my real surname was Parkinson, not the name I had grown up with. Being told that, at 21, turned my life upside down. It gave me some trouble getting my surname changed on my benefits ID papers, but knowing my real name meant a lot to me.

"I'm ashamed to say that I also stole money from my mother. But years later, when I was selling The Big Issue in Norwich, I paid her back, every penny. We don't keep in regular contact. She has another family now, and I complicate things.

"In Bristol, I got involved with some travellers who promised me a home and a job. That didn't happen, but when I tried to leave, they threatened to throw me through a window if I didn't stay with them. Eventually, I escaped back onto the streets."

Mark says that he has been in and out of prison, but during his last sentence – five and a half years for burglary – his life began to change.



Mark Parkinson, who is now a member of The Salvation Army, is pictured here. Picture by Michael Grimshaw.

"I decided I'd had enough of this kind of life, and I prayed: 'God, if you're there, help me to do something about it all and get free from drugs.' I believe that was the start of my new life as a Christian.

"I managed to get off the drugs, but I wasn't ready to give up drink at that point. Alcohol kept me warm on the streets and numbed my mind. I didn't break that habit till I was released from prison. I've been clear for three years now.

"I asked the Lord to show me where I should go, and ended up in Bedford for a while selling The Big Issue. I'd been a seller since 1996, and always did this when I went somewhere new. It helped my confidence, gave me a purpose and kept me sober – even though I've often been spat on and sworn at.

"After living in St Albans and Ipswich, I decided to go to Norwich. Even though I'd spent time in the prison there, it seemed like a

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diction and past for Mark



Salvation Army in Norwich, enjoys a chat with Big Issue seller Jimmy (left).

good city. So I walked the 45 miles from Ipswich and started selling The Big Issue in the city centre.

"The other place I looked for when I went somewhere new was The Salvation Army. They always believed in me and what I said. My background has made me very suspicious of new people, and I'm wary about who to trust. I've been let down so many times, but never by them."

One Sunday, Mark heard a group of Salvation Army members holding a street service. He kept thinking about what he'd heard, and the next morning he committed his life to God again. "This time," he says, "I was really determined to turn my life around."

"I was sleeping in a shop doorway when Major Barry Willson tapped me on

the shoulder. He co-ordinates volunteers on the Army's soup run in Norwich, which happens every day of the year.

"He invited me down to their soup kitchen, but I told him I was afraid I'd be tempted by the smell of alcohol from other rough sleepers. So he sent an email round to all the volunteers, telling them where I was, and from then on someone brought me sandwiches and hot drinks every night."

"Two volunteers – Mark and Sarah Byrne – came several times. They had become Salvation Army members in recent months. I was interested in what they had to say."

"We met again one wet Wednesday night and chatted for a couple of hours. They managed to get me a room in someone's house, which was fine, but it didn't

last long. The chap was arrested soon afterwards for growing cannabis in his back garden, so I was back on the streets."

"Then they invited me to spend Christmas with them, and, several visits later, actually offered me a room in their house. They have four children, and it was a big step on both sides. I've lived there for two years now, and they have "adopted" me as one of the family."

"They also managed to trace my real father, who lives in Chatteris, and we were able to meet for the first time in 40 years. We're still getting to know each other, but are in regular contact and go fishing together. There's a lot he doesn't understand about my former life, but he's pleased that I have managed to turn myself around and overcome my addictions."

Although he has overcome his alcohol addiction, Mark is aware how easy it would be to start drinking again and so is careful to avoid temptation.

"If, for instance, we go out for a meal and the atmosphere is heavy with the smell of alcohol, I don't go in. We just go somewhere else. Christmas can be difficult. I won't eat Christmas cake, pudding or mince pies, because the fruit is usually soaked in it. It's not worth the risk."

After moving in with Mark and Sarah, Mark started attending worship meetings regularly at a Salvation Army church in Norwich. So what were his first impressions?

"I'd been to several meetings before at different places, mainly because I knew I could get a hot drink there. Some churches are a bit snooty if you turn up and are a bit smelly, but the Army welcomes people from all walks of life."

"The church at Norwich was a lot bigger than any I'd been to before, and the first couple of times weren't so easy. I still don't really like new places or new people. But everyone was friendly and welcoming, and I soon began to feel comfortable. Everyone is supportive. It's like the family I never had."

"Last December, I became a 'proper' member, wearing Salvation Army uniform. It meant a lot to me that my dad was there to see me, along with all my adoptive family. I never thought it would happen to me."

Mark now works part-time as a care assistant at the Army's day-care centre and helps provide a weekly hot meal for people experiencing homelessness. He also takes his turn on the same soup run that brought him into contact with the people who offered him a home and – for the first time – gave him the opportunity of sharing a family life.

"I believe God sent Mark and Sarah to me at the right time, and I can't thank them enough for taking me into their home and having faith in me."

■ This article is reproduced courtesy of The War Cry.



From the left are Pastor Jon Norman, the Very Rev David Paul, Rev Julian Pursehouse, Very Rev Jane Hedges and Bishop Graham James.

Show of Christian unity

■ During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January, the Bishop of Norwich welcomed three new ecumenical canons to Norwich's Anglican Cathedral.

The Rt Rev Graham James, was delighted to install the Very Rev David Paul, Dean of St John's Catholic Cathedral, the Rev Julian Pursehouse, Chair of the East Anglia Methodist District and Pastor Jon Norman of Soul Church, as ecumenical canons in front of a full Cathedral on Sunday January 22.

Joined with clergy from around the diocese, a congregation from a range of Christian traditions and by the choirs of Norwich Cathedral and of St John's RC Cathedral, Bishop Graham underlined the importance of Christian unity and that the appointments of these ecumenical canons further illustrate the deepening relationships between the different churches in Norwich and more widely in the Diocese.

Bishop Graham said: "I am delighted that Fr David Paul and Rev Julian Pursehouse accepted my invitation to become ecumenical canons of our cathedral church, illustrating the partnership in the gospel we enjoy with the Roman Catholic and Methodist churches."

"I am delighted too that Jon

Norman from Soul Church accepted my invitation to become an ecumenical canon. Along with his wife Chantel, he leads a very large and growing community church and has quickly become a significant church leader in our city."

Rev Julian said: "It's a very gracious invitation on behalf of the Bishop and the Diocese and an indication of the extent of the friendship and the cooperation between the different traditions and churches."

Fr David Paul said: "This is a very tangible expression of our friendship, co-operation and working together. Because we are a two-cathedral city it seems to make sense to work together and participate in lots of good works that we can do - and have joint services such as we're having on Good Friday for example. I was very pleased to accept the invitation as a sign of our friendship and working together for the service of the gospel."

Pastor John said: "I think this is a step towards unity and we're growing stronger in our relationships and links in organisations and churches in the city and this a step towards that. I'm honoured to be a part of that, and I think we all play a part in that."

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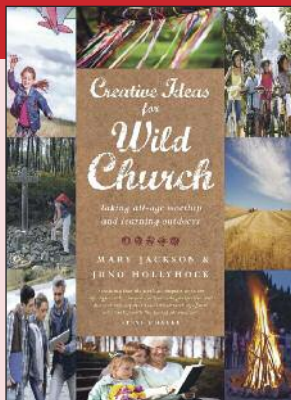
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BOOK REVIEWS

Creative Ideas for Wild Church: Taking all-age worship and learning outdoors

Mary Jackson and Juno Hollyhock
Canterbury Press £19.99
Revelation price £18.00

■ This innovative and imaginative resource offers learning, worship activities and whole service outlines to help churches engage with outside communities, whether rural or urban. With current trends encouraging us to re-connect with nature, schools



are building outdoor classrooms and 11,000 organisations belong to the Wild Network which encourages children to get outside. Simultaneously, Forest church, the

by Steve Foyster

Eco-congregation and the rewilding spirituality movement reflect this trend within the church.

Not just aimed at energetic outdoor types, this exciting resource creatively blends the Christian year with the natural seasons including an all-age Advent outdoor adventure, creating an outdoor Easter garden, kite flying at Ascension, going on a prayer pilgrimage and using tree ribbons for remembrance. Practical advice on health and safety and safeguarding also included.

A Christian Guide to Environmental Issues

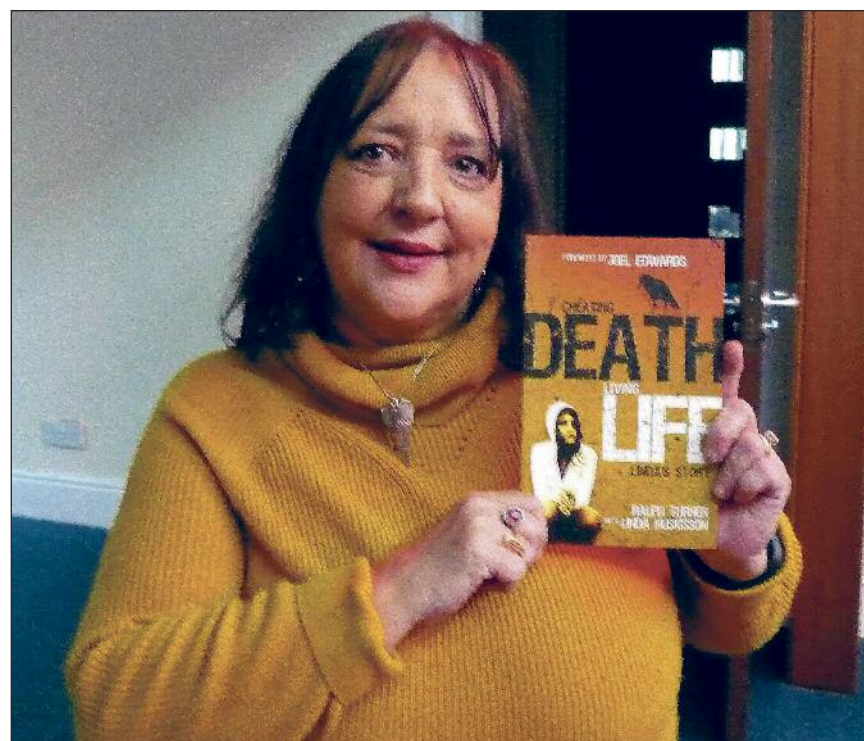
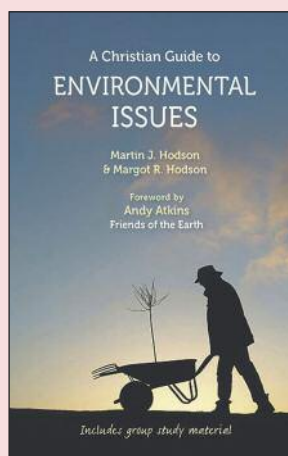
Dr Martin J Hodson and Revd Margot R Hodson
 (Foreword by Andy Atkins - Friends of the Earth)
Bible Reading Fellowship £9.99
Revelation price £8.50

■ Both authors' have professional experience in plant science and environmental ethics. Their deep commitment to critical issues, that this timely book addresses,

shine through, as they consider eight key contemporary issues, including climate change, food, biodiversity and population.

With extremely rapid environmental changes impacting in such a direct way, the Hodsons accentuate that we all belong to a human community which must now come to terms with new ways of living.

This comprehensive, accessible and practical guide offers various ways forward, with helpful eco-tips balanced by Biblical wisdom.



Linda with the book about her story Cheating Death, Living Life

Escape from life of abuse

Domestic violence sent **Linda Huskisson** down the path of drugs, alcohol, and prostitution. A remarkable encounter with God helped her escape her life of enslavement and she now draws on her experience to help others who suffer abuse. **Helen Baldry** reports.

She was homeless for several months and describes the first night as the scariest before she had learnt how to survive on the streets. She learnt how to get drunk on vodka or high in order to numb the pain and the cold. "I would down a whole bottle of vodka and knock myself senseless."

Linda soon began working as a prostitute and lived in fear of beatings from her pimp. She said, "I felt ashamed of what I'd become. There are always secrets when you're in that state. There are always things you hide. You've been told you're worthless so many times so you start believing it."

Two Christians who prayed in the red light district had told Linda 'Jesus loves you'. They persistently prayed for her and turned up in hospital after Linda had been beaten so severely she had a ruptured spleen. Linda recalls that there was no judgement in their attitude, "They just loved me... I thought either they are crazy or there's some truth in it". It was there that Linda gave her life to Jesus.

In the hospital chapel, Linda opened the Bible for the first time and it fell open at Jeremiah 29. Linda said, "God was talking to me that day." Linda experienced physical healing and broke free from her addictions. Her journey to recovery was not easy, and she spent time in prison for cannabis offences, a time she describes as 'the best experience because I had time to read the Bible and get to know God properly. He strengthened me.'

Linda's children had been put into care and adopted – she is thankful that she now has them in her life and has a nurturing role in her grandchildren's lives in a way that she was unable to with her own children.

Linda describes herself as a 'survivor' and 'overcomer' of domestic violence and she told her story at an event in Norwich organised by Christian charity Hope Into Action of which she is a trustee. She said "I love the vision of churches coming alongside people like myself."

Linda runs a group for women who have experienced domestic violence. They build their confidence and can share their stories in a safe place without judgement. Her story is told in her book called Cheating Death, Living Life.

REVELATION

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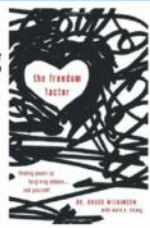
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Indian prayer dream

Norfolk vicar **Rev Canon Simon Stokes** and members of his family travelled to India late last year to formally open and dedicate a new House of Prayer built from funds raised by his **Sprowston Parish**. **Jenny Seal** reports.



Christine, Simon and Mary in India and, below, the new Zeal Gospel Prayer House.

Simon, Vicar of the Sprowston Parish, his wife Christine and daughter Mary travelled to India in October last year for 11 days in order to dedicate a new plant of the Bangalore based Zeal Gospel Church.

The new Zeal Gospel Prayer House situated in a village on the edge of a culturally significant mountain, known as 'TVM' in rural Tamil Nadu, was built by funds raised by the Sprowston Parish, which includes the churches of St Cuthbert's, St Mary & St Margaret's.

As well as providing a place to worship, the House of Prayer will act as a valuable community facility for the developing village.

Simon said: "It will be a place where education will happen and part of their programme has been giving skills to local women so they can support themselves and their families without getting trapped in the slavery and sex trade that goes on."

Simon has been out to visit the Zeal Gospel Church several times. He said: "I sort of fell in love with the place and the project, and therefore have been back with different teams. There is just something amazing about being there with people who have nothing but yet want to share everything they've got, and are so excited for the Lord."

Sprowston Parish raised the necessary funds by holding mission evenings and lunches, where people gave generously. Also Simon and Christine celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary and encouraged friends and family to mark the occasion by donating to the Indian church appeal.

Simon, Christine and Mary were special guests at the packed out service of dedication for the new 20m x 15m building, which was still being worked on the day before its opening. Simon recalls the strong sense of God's presence on the day.

"We dedicated the building and cut the ribbon, and were just starting the service when suddenly out of nowhere we had about 90 seconds to two minutes of a wind," said Simon. "I stood there thinking this wind was going to rip the roof off and then suddenly realised: 'was this the Holy Spirit?'. It came from nowhere and then just stopped. It was a very powerful experience."

A community-wide meal of celebration followed the service and then baptisms in the



newly built outside baptistry. Simon said: "It was an amazing privilege to be part of that huge family."

During the trip Simon, who was registered blind in 1986, travelled with a white stick and a sighted guide. He said: "I daren't take the guide dog, because I have enough worries making sure I'm healthy without the dog being sick."

He admits there were some particular challenges but jokes: "In Bangalore trying to cross those roads, I think I was at an advantage of not being able to see!"

Simon's daughter Mary is currently studying Special Educational Needs at university and during the trip spoke passionately to church groups about inclusivity.

Simon notes: "I think over the years I've been going out, there has been a warming to people with disability."

Simon's overwhelming memories focus around the attitudes of the people he met and the contrast with typical Western approaches.

He noted the sense of contentment, pride and an eagerness to grasp hold of opportunities despite such limited resources.

Since returning from their trip, Sprowston Parish have raised further funds to buy a new water bore-hole, which as well as supplying the new building with water will also supply water to local houses. They are now raising funds to buy the pastor a motorbike and a house next door to the new building.

Simon hopes to return with a team from Sprowston at the beginning of next year.



New Norwich City Crier Bob Lloyd at last year's Celebrate Norfolk.

Bob named new Norwich City Crier

■ Former church worship leader and postman, Bob Lloyd, has been appointed as Norwich City Crier after a six-year apprenticeship as deputy.

Bob officially took on the civic post from his predecessor David Bullock in a ceremony at City Hall on January 13.

David has been City Crier for over 30 years and represented Norwich in town crying competitions all over the world, winning several. In 2001 he was runner-up in a competition to be named best town crier in the world.

Lord Mayor of Norwich, Cllr Marion Maxwell, presented David with a certificate to mark his retirement and David in turn presented the Civic Stave to his successor Bob.

Bob said: "I am extremely honoured to succeed David and am not sure I will be able to live up to the high standard he has set, but I will do my best."

Bob was appointed as David's deputy in 2010 following an interview and a successful 'test cry' from the steps of City Hall. His previous employment had been as a baker for 20 years and then for the next 23 years at Royal Mail.

He had also had over 40 years' involvement with local churches as a worship leader, and his outgoing personality and experience as a professional toastmaster stood him in good stead.

He will take over civic duties such as at Freeman of the City ceremonies, leading the annual Lord Mayor's procession and proclaiming the appointment of the new Lord Mayor and Sheriff from the steps of City Hall every May.

Bob is also available for hire to raise the profile of shops and businesses on the streets of Norwich and will continue his work as a professional toastmaster attending upwards of 30 events each year.

These include weddings, award ceremonies, fashion shows, corporate dinners and charity balls. "Every couple whose wedding I do get prayed for," said Bob.

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Norwich church launches job club

■ Surrey Chapel in Norwich has launched a new Job Club giving practical help to jobseekers, building positive skills for employment in a friendly, relaxed environment.

The Job Club where unemployed people will be able to access extra support and practical advice free of charge began on March 21. It is run by volunteers who have undergone training with charity Christians Against Poverty (CAP).

Since they were launched in 2012, CAP Job Clubs have grown to a network of 170 across the UK, helping more than 1,000 people into work, many of them long-term unemployed. The initiative currently boasts a 24% success rate, up to seven times more successful than some government-commissioned work schemes.

Job Club Manager Dawn Arden from Surrey Chapel, who will be leading the course, said: "All are very welcome to join us for coffee and cake at 11am followed by session one of the Job Club Course and a light lunch too.

"This is a really practical course that does help folk back into the workplace. Knowing many people are out of work – and yet have talents and skills going to waste – we just felt we had to do something and Christians Against Poverty's training and resources seemed like a really great fit for us."

CAP Job Clubs are based on a programme called 'the three Cs: Course, Community and Coaching'. The eight-week course will provide those looking for work with skills and abilities, such as CV writing, interview technique and the value of volunteering.

The Course runs alongside supportive peer-to-peer Community, where those looking for work can share their experiences, struggles and advice around a relaxed meal. In addition each person is given one-to-one coaching to develop their strengths and identify other opportunities, such as volunteering or a college course.

This new initiative will complement the Debt Management Centre at Surrey Chapel which has been supporting local people to become debt free for the past 5 years.

The club will run weekly on Tuesdays at 11am at Surrey Chapel, 2 to 6 Botolph Street.

From despair to joy

Builder **Steve Renwick** recently shared with a **Norwich** audience about his journey from drugs and despair to joy. **Mike Wiltshire** reports.

From school days, Steve was "constantly looking to be loved – I'd misbehave in 'funny' ways just to get attention, and was often in trouble". By the 1970s, Steve was into drugs which "fuelled my nights of debauchery and partying."

At the age of 40, with by then a comfortable home after earning good money in the building sector, and touring the world with his wife, Michelle, "the love of my life," Steve nevertheless felt a deep inner emptiness which he simply could not explain. Despite outward success, "I was still hunting for love," he recalls.

Steve and Michelle had been married as teenage sweethearts, but after 22 years and success in business, Steve's life "started to unravel" as he slid into depression for eight years.

In the midst of growing anger and depression, he even considered suicide, but could not bear the thought of his wife finding him dead in a field.

Steve's troubles were compounded by the death of his dad at 67, plus the loss of his 'two best mates' in a business dispute, and anger issues. "They and their families just walked out of my life – and 35 years of my life were wiped out, gone! My work was suffering and I had a couple of building jobs that also went wrong."

At 48, he was about to "throw his marriage away, having lost hope to the point of utter destruction". At times, Steve's depression was



Steve Renwick.

so bad he wanted to smash the home up.

"Michelle asked me why I was so evil? I said I didn't know."

Although Steve "had a hang-up over religion", he once sat in an empty church and simply cried in despair over his depression.

Among his clients was Henry, a successful businessman who was also a Christian, who suggested Steve join Alpha, a Christian discovery course on the meaning of life. He told Steve: "You need Jesus in your life."

Six months later, Nora, another of Steve's Christian clients, invited Steve and Michelle to lunch along with an invitation that they visit

her local church, Holy Trinity, in Cambridge.

Steve reluctantly went along, "expecting to see half a dozen people and a boring vicar," but was amazed to find 300 young people and a band in the church.

He was very moved to see how several students quietly prayed for another young person. "It was beautiful – I saw genuine friendship there."

Steve realised that he, too, could be prayed for – and might also join an Alpha Course. On the final weekend of the course, six years ago, he joined others in a life-changing prayer – and physically felt he was being squeezed in a strong hug "as though Jesus showed me that he loved me. All of a sudden I had found the love I'd always wanted."

Friends on the course told him: "You're glowing, you're shining – you're a new person!"

His wife Michelle, who is a mobile hairdresser, said later: "The lovely husband I once knew has come back!"

Steve and Michelle began attending church together – "God is at the centre of our lives now," says Steve, they have seen reconciliation in their family and others "touched by God"

as they have shared their story.

"I have never been more alive," adds Steve, who is now involved in the men's ministry at his church.

"When I look back on my life, I realise how many times God's love had rescued me in very tough times without me ever seeing it – or perhaps more truthfully wanting to see it." He adds: "It's a love story, really – God's extraordinary love for an ordinary man."

In Norwich, Steve was sharing his story at a monthly dinner evening of the Full Gospel Businessmen.

Teenage rebel and missionary nurse celebrates 100th birthday



Mary Welander.

■ **Continues from front page** thrill at the personal message, 'Jesus said unto her, Mary!' " (John 20:6).

Mary qualified as a State Registered Nurse just as World War One began, and became a staff nurse at a military hospital. A Christian magazine, entitled China's Millions, prompted her to apply to the China Inland Mission. Her 'call' to the mission field was a tough test, as she finally knelt in tears at midnight, saying: "Do as you like, Lord, I am all yours."

In 1945, Mary sailed to Bombay, India, crossed the nation by train, then flew to China via Burma.

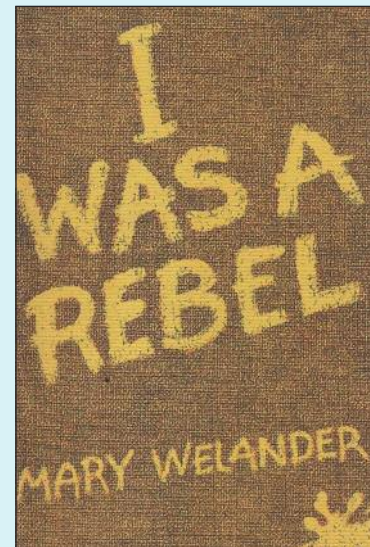
Between medical clinics in remote areas of North-West China, Mary did intensive language studies in Mandarin, while attending to Chinese, Tibetan and Mongolese patients, and helping many lepers who feared for their lives as Communist forces began to suppress all expressions of faith.

Although facing great danger in

the revolution, the missionaries laboured on until put under house-arrest. Then all possessions were seized and Mary, with others, was deported in 1951, travelling vast distances in an open lorry in freezing weather to Hong Kong.

They were dark days, but Mary is encouraged by the fact that the Chinese church has grown rapidly, with perhaps more than 100 million Christians today, eclipsing the 86 million members of the ruling Communist Party in a nation that is technically 'atheist'.

In 1952, Mary was on her way to Malaya (now Malaysia), a land then in the grip of a fierce jungle war with Communist terrorists. General Gerald Templar had been sent to assume control 'to win hearts and minds' in a racially-divided community. Nicknamed 'The Tiger of Malaya', Templar especially looked for Mandarin speakers to serve among the marginalised Chinese – thus, people such as Mary were very welcome.



Much of Mary's ministry in three areas – China, Malaysia and the UK – has involved great personal sacrifice. Mary says: "I set out to love and laugh, mourn and weep with those who rejoiced or sorrowed. I became one with them as a sister in

Christ among local fellow-believers."

After Mary retired from the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (formerly CIM), she saw England as her third mission field, starting Bible study groups and helping to plant and grow churches in rural areas such as Tydd Gote, near Wisbech, and Hitcham, between Hadleigh and Stowmarket.

Her long-time friend, Rosemary English, former JP and prominent Christian in Norwich, said: "Mary's work of church planting in rural East Anglia brought rewarding lessons in dependence on God and the discovery that age is no barrier."

Mary's first book, *I Was a Rebel*, has been reprinted five times and has inspired many young people to Christian service. In the book, Mary, looking towards heaven, says her thrilling adventures are part of an "unfinished symphony" and concludes: "The traditional ending is perfectly true – 'She lived happily ever after,' because she will."

New church pastor beats chronic illness

■ On Sunday March 5, Anne-Marie Fewell was ordained and inducted as pastor of Victory Villages Church in Mid Norfolk following recovery from a debilitating 10-year illness with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

Anne-Marie studied theology at Spurgeons College in London, to train for Baptist ministry but before she was able to be ordained and settled in a church she became very ill.

Diagnosed with the debilitating illness ME Anne-Marie was bed-bound for around 10 years.

Richard Eglinton from Victory Villages Church said: "Two years ago at Spring Harvest Anne-

Marie was prayed for and received a large measure of healing and since then has been gradually becoming stronger."

Anne-Marie has two young daughters, whom she home educates.

Prior to her illness she worked in a number of churches of different denominations and also with London City Mission.

Victory Villages Church became affiliated to the Eastern Baptist Association (EBA) in 2016 and the EBA Area Minister, Rev Richard Lewis, conducted the ordination and induction and gave the address.

Pastors Tony and Jane Field, who started Victory Villages Church in 2005, are stepping aside from leadership, but will continue to play an active role within the church.

During the service a brief account was given of how Victory Villages Church came into being, and Anne-Marie gave testimony to God's calling to her to village work, which was at last being fulfilled.

Around 70 friends and family attended the service.

Victory Villages Church meets in North Elmham Memorial Hall.



Yarmouth church gets new leader

■ Kingsgate Community Church in Great Yarmouth has announced that Adam and Lorna Bradley and their family will be joining the church this spring, with Adam taking the role of Senior Church Leader.

Adam and Lorna (pictured above) are currently at Life Church in Peterborough, where Adam is lead elder.

Talking about his new role in Yarmouth, Adam said: "As a family we are very excited about everything God is going to do in this next season in and through Kingsgate Community Church.

"That reminds me of one of my favourite quotes by the late Charles Colson: "The church is not incidental to the great cosmic struggle for the hearts and souls of modern men and women; It is the instrument God has chosen for the Battle - a battle we are called to by virtue of being members of His body."

"I have a grand vision of the church because the church is God's people who He has propelled into His mission field with His empowering presence!"

Simon Head, a leader at Kingsgate, said "We are thrilled that the Bradleys are joining us. As a fellowship, we are really looking forward to this new season with excitement as God continues to unfold His plan for us here."

www.kingsgatecommunitychurch.org

Plea for refugee aid

When Wymondham mother-of-two, **Alison Marlow**, saw the graphic news reels of **Middle Eastern** refugees living in sub-zero temperatures, her heart burned with compassion – especially for the barely-clad children and helpless babies. **Sandie Shirley** reports.

Alison Marlow has issued a rallying call for refugee aid.



She turned her burden of care over to God, wanting to do more than pray. Two years later she is a vital channel for material aid, having sent 550 boxes of quality clothing to the vulnerable and overlooked, after joining national Christian charity, Samara's Aid Appeal, as a registered collector.

Alison's mission began in January 2015 when she mounted a heart-felt plea to her church – Hope Community Church Wymondham – for warm clothing for refugees trying to survive the harsh winter. Within two weeks, two car-loads of clothing for adults and children were boxed and labelled in time to join the charity shipment across Europe to the Iraq border. It was the beginning of God's on-going, miraculous provision, with offers of help coming from both inside the church and the wider community.

"Every time there has been a problem God has always provided the solution. I have learnt not to worry about the details because if God's in it, you only have to push a door slightly and it will open," says Alison.

She extends a rallying call for donations from her Wymondham community and beyond – response is growing through word of mouth and support from Browick Road Primary School and Wymondham Girl Guides.

Now she is looking for a larger dry storage area to enable her to continue with the work and is hopeful for a team of volunteers to help pack prior to each shipment

The quality clothing is earmarked for minority groups of refugees mainly in Syria and Iraq, people who haven't made it to the big UN and Red Cross camps, where the main aid is, and who are living in tents and partially-built buildings without windows, she explains.

Alison recalls the TV footage that highlighted those who fled to the mountains for safety in just the lightweight clothes they were wearing; she was heartbroken. As a mum, she was also moved by the suffering of tiny vulnerable babies when she saw a mother holding her newborn. "Instead of smiling with joy she looked so hopeless," says Alison, who promotes fundraising initiatives to provide basic hygiene packs for expectant mothers and their babies.

Her faith in action is prompted by the Bible passage, James 2: 15-16, and the reminder to clothe and feed the poor. Today she is encouraged when she learns about the mobilisation of churches nationwide to collect generous donations for Samara Aid Appeal. There are even furry boots for children to wear in the snow instead of flip flops and some refugees are dressed in mink coats in place of summer t-shirts to stave off the freezing winter temperatures that claimed 6,000 lives, primarily in Iraq, during the winter of 20014/15, explains Alison.

She first learnt about the tragedies from Canon Andrew White who used to live among the Christian community in Iraq as the 'vicar of Bagdad', but had to leave after his own life came under threat. "IS (Islamic State) terrorise those in the towns and villages so people have to flee for their lives, pay a tax or convert to Islam," says Alison.

Those captured face brutal execution and women and young girls are trafficked and sold as slaves, explains Samara's Aid Appeal which began when Brighton woman, Samara Levy, rallied the mums at her son's school to donate clothing. Soon UK churches also became involved with prayer and practical aid to help ease the atrocities with three annual shipments in September/October, January and around Easter.

Winter and spring clothing (as well as quality bedding and towels) are taken by container lorry to Jordan, on the Iraq border, and distributed to refugees living in makeshift shelters and tents. Says Alison: "I pray there will be some healing for the recipients when they know that many of the generous donations come through UK churches who love them and care about their plight."

Contact Alison at office@hccw.co.uk or visit: www.samarasaidappeal.org

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30 years of women priests

■ It took decades to clear the way for women to become ordained in the Church of England. The legislation was prepared 30 years ago and the vote was narrowly passed 25 years ago. The vote marked a turning point for women who were able to pursue their calling to ministry in the Anglican church.

Today there are many female vicars leading Norfolk churches, including Rev Heather Cracknell who is vicar of St Francis in the Heartsease area of Norwich. When she is out and about wearing her dog collar, Heather notices people doing double-takes: "I don't think I'm what people expect to see when they see a vicar!"

Heather was ordained in 2011 and she believes the way women are represented is important – on our screens, in the workplace – and also in our pulpits. Fortunately, she has experienced very little pushback in the churches she's worked in.

Heather acknowledges that there is a lot of everyday sexism in our society and she believes in gently but firmly challenging this when it occurs.

She said, "It's impossible to say that these things don't impact on how I feel about ministry. To be in a space that used to be just occupied by men.... that changes things."

Heather aims to be an active advocate for women. She said: "I have a heart for those suf-



Rev Heather Cracknell.

fering from domestic violence, sexual assault and abuse." Heather would like to see women channelling their energies into something constructive – rather than engaging in negative thinking about themselves or each other, something which the media readily incites. She believes change begins when women start to uphold each other.

Heather feels strongly about teaching girls about their self-worth and their value, describing this as "one of my real passions."



Pictured above are participants at the YMCA Norfolk Sleep Easy at Easton near Norwich. Pictures by Julia Holland.

YMCA event puts spotlight on youth homelessness

Supporters, staff and YMCA residents gathered at Diocesan House in Easton on March 3 to take part in the annual event, this year joining together with 15 other YMCAs across the country. They hope to raise around £10,000.

Participants built their own cardboard shelters, enjoyed team-building games and heard from YMCA Norfolk staff about their work and from residents about their own real life experiences.

Mortgage advisor Sophie Savvides led a team from Nat West in Norwich. She said: "My day job is to help people buy their dream home and it is important to acknowledge that some people don't have a home at all or the opportunity to have any sort of shelter over their heads."

Her colleague, Ruth Matthews, spoke about the help YMCA Norfolk had given her own son Gregory: "When things weren't working out for him with us at home he moved to the YMCA and with their help managed to pull his life around. He got some exams which he never got at school, he got the discipline he needed and he took every opportunity

Over 50 people slept under the stars in cardboard shelters in early March at Easton near Norwich to raise awareness of the problem of youth homelessness and the vital work of YMCA Norfolk to combat it.

they offered him.

"Since that time he has met the love of his life, he has a little girl and they both work full-time for ITV and have bought a house together in Manchester. He is on his way, whereas at one point he was distraught, he just did not know where his life was going or how he was going to get there."

There was also a team from Early Help North, East and Broadland, including Michael Mills, who said: "In our work we see youth homelessness and the difference that organisations such as YMCA Norfolk can make day in and day out giving that support.

"This event is a great challenge. When I did it last year, it was so cold and I got home and had a hot shower. I just don't know how people do it night after night – they don't have a choice. I am safe and they are not - they could get beaten up or have their stuff stolen.

"It is that feeling of having no hope, of what am I going to do, no-one cares or loves me - it is really heart-breaking. Doing something like this raises funds and hopefully makes a difference for some young people.

YMCA Norfolk CEO, Tim Sweeting, said: "We had a really great group of people who were not happy just hearing about youth homelessness but wanted to come along and do something about it.

"They will go away with a much better understanding of the issue of youth homelessness, hearing from us and from young people and their real-life experiences. They will also hear that there is not always much of a gap between those of us who think we have a lot and people who don't and are suddenly in need of other people's help."

www.ymcanorfolk.org

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