

GOOD NEWS

FOR NORWICH & NORFOLK

Winter, 2017: FREE

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Norwich pastor's role after Texas massacre



■ Norwich church pastor Jon Norman was guest preacher at a Texas church on Sunday November 5, the very same night that 26 men, women and children were shot dead in a Baptist church in nearby San Antonio.

Jon, who leads Soul Church in Norwich, was immediately invited to go to the scene where he prayed with church families and community members. Nine members of one family were among the dead.

Jon mentioned the heart-breaking event while sharing his life story at a monthly dinner of the Full Gospel Businessmen at the Mercure Hotel in Norwich recently. Jon also addressed the age-old question: "Why do bad things happen to good people?"

"I don't have the answer," said Jon. "There is so much we will never understand this side of eternity."

■ Read more of Jon's life story on page 4.

Brave journey to a new life in Norwich

War, prison, blackmail, hazardous seas and being locked into a container lorry were not enough to stop brave Sudanese refugee Hafiz Omar battling his way to Norwich and the hope of a new life. **Keith Morris reports.**

Hafiz, a 20-year-old farmer, escaped the civil war in Sudan only to end up in a Libyan prison after being blackmailed by the local militia and then jailed. Scared, and not knowing what to do, he was persuaded to head for a better life in Italy and was crowded with over 100 other refugees into a tiny boat. Surviving mountainous seas, Hafiz ended up homeless on the streets of Rome. From there he headed for France and Paris where he ended up in a camp under a flyover.

He then went to the infamous 'Jungle' refugee camp at Calais and made the journey to England locked inside a container lorry where he was found by immigration officials.

Months of immigration paperwork followed before Hafiz was officially accepted in this country and a friend suggested he come to Norwich, where his life finally started to look much brighter.

"I could speak very little English at that time and didn't know what to do," he said.

Bridge Plus helped him with immigration issues and referred him to YMCA Norfolk as he was still sleeping rough or on friends' floors.



Hafiz Omar, above, has now been joined by his wife Fatima, inset, in Norwich. Picture Keith Morris/Julia Holland.

At first he was in Supported Lodgings, then YMCA Central and finally Barnards Yard, supported by key worker Kev Dynes.

"YMCA Norfolk gave me a safe place to stay, a room and bed," said Hafiz. "With all the patience I have been shown I was able to get my head straight and look ahead."

The Red Cross, Bridge Plus, Shelter, MAP, and the job centre also played a part in helping Hafiz with benefits, English classes and getting a job as a kitchen porter in

a Norwich restaurant. They were also able to help him bring his wife Fatima to England and successfully apply for a council flat.

Fatima is expecting the couple's first child and Hafiz, now aged 23, is more hopeful for the future of himself and his family.

"I want to continue to work full-time to be able to pay the bills and look after my family. Eventually I would like to study building engineering and be able to help my family and home country Sudan."

Hafiz, a Muslim, said: "I am happy to say thanks to God and those people who have helped rescue my life. I have not felt judged and always been treated with respect by people here in England."

"Sometimes I am sad about the things that have happened in my life, I miss my family and all the bad things that still happen in Sudan, but with the help of YMCA Norfolk and others who have supported me, I feel strong enough to carry on."



Singer Emma is dreaming

■ Cross-over soprano Emma Nuule, a former Norwich hospital cleaner, is realising her dream of being a professional singer but she also has a dream to help disadvantaged African children to perform.

When Emma (30), a committed Christian, sings at one of her sell-out classical concerts she makes a point of praising God for giving her the opportunity to perform and realise her dreams. Now the classical singer has her eyes fixed on another dream, to set up a performing arts school named 'Praise and Perform' for poor children in her adopted home of Namibia.

■ Read Emma's story on page 3.



Star hails the power of prayer

■ Pop star Alexandra Burke, who won the 2008 X-Factor with the song Hallelujah, has now been taking BBC1's Strictly Come Dancing show by storm as well.

But the multi-talented performer does not take all the credit for herself and says that prayer is central to her pre-performance routine.

■ Read more on page 6.

GOOD NEWS

FOR NORWICH & NORFOLK

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Finding peace through the storms of life

■ I love the sea, but as we walked along the beach at Rossbeigh, County Kerry, Ireland in October a day or two prior to Storm Ophelia's arrival, we were already being battered by the wind, waves and rain, and I was reminded again of the sheer power that exists in this natural force.

Our return flights were (sensibly) cancelled on the Monday, so instead we spent a day indoors watching the weather around us. By the following day, beyond the normal autumnal debris, there was very little evidence that we had been subjected to gale force winds and rain for the previous 24 hours.

It being our last full day, we visited the Gap of Dunloe and were privileged to witness the bluest skies, and most picturesque views of hills, rocks and completely calm lakes – how peaceful!

It reminded me of the story in Mark's gospel where Jesus is with his disciples travelling across the Sea of Galilee. Jesus falls asleep in the bottom of the boat, meanwhile a ferocious storm whips up, and the disciples are in fear

Darren Woodward, senior pastor at Oak Grove Community Church in Norwich reflects on the peace after a storm.



for their lives. In a panic they wake Jesus requesting his help. Jesus utters the words "Peace be still" and immediately the wind ceased and there was a great calm.

Peace is a running theme, in Jesus' life. Prophesied as the Prince of Peace, Jesus entered the world almost under the radar. Rather than post an announcement on social

media, God chose to announce the birth of his Son to some shepherds huddled up on the hill overlooking Bethlehem – the heavenly host of angels filled the skies with singing proclaiming "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth and goodwill to all men".

Immediately before his death, Jesus in conversation with his disciples reassures them "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you."

Looking around at our world, on the news, even within our own lives and communities, peace can appear transient or out of reach.

However Jesus, the very embodiment of peace, the incarnate promise of eternal life, demonstrates to us through his life and teaching that whatever we may face, whether we are being thrown around in the midst of the storm or experiencing moments of calm, that one day all things will be made new and if we put our trust in him, we will live in peace and wholeness forever.

Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth!

Californian dreamers

Californian rockers **Switchfoot** took the LCR at UEA by storm recently as their 'Looking for Europe' tour came to **Norwich**, with a powerful, energetic performance that thrilled the audience. **Mark Heybourne** reports.

A hugely successful global rock band from San Diego, Switchfoot's success has seen them win a Grammy and sell millions of albums with consistent chart success in America.

But there is also something different about the band. When the lights first went down it was for a brilliant musical video talking about the band's partnership with the charity Food for the Hungry and how you could get involved – straight away you saw this was a band that wanted to use their music as a force for good, to shine a light on things where we can make a difference.

They are a rock band, all of whom are Christians, but they shy away from describing themselves as such – but their music does the talking for them.

"Every song tonight is a love song," declared Jon Foreman the charismatic front man of the energetic band. "Songs about a love



Switchfoot at the UEA in Norwich. Picture by Stuart Ling.

that can overcome violence, a love that can overcome all that is against us, a love that is consuming all consuming, a love that is transcending."

Its stirring poetic imagery in a high energy music performance was packed with positive life affirming moments.

As the first chords of Holy Water

were struck the charisma and energy of the band was immediately apparent. Switchfoot have a reputation as a thrilling live band that connect and involve the audience.

There wasn't a single song where the crowd wasn't singing, dancing and clapping along – urged along by band who seemed to enjoy

playing together as much as the crowd enjoyed the songs.

Lead singer Jon even left the stage to join the audience to dance and sing while his band mates continued to rock powerfully on stage.

Although I had never heard them before, Switchfoot are my new favourite band, and I hope we see them back in Norwich again.



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Norwich soprano Emma dreams a dream

Norwich soprano Emma Nuule performs. Picture: Dave Montgomery.

Cross-over soprano **Emma Nuule**, a former **Norwich** hospital cleaner, is realising her dream of being a professional singer but she also has a dream to help disadvantaged African children to perform, **Jenny Seal** reports.

When Emma (30), a committed Christian, sings at one of her sell-out classical concerts she makes a point of praising God for giving her the opportunity to perform and realise her dreams. Now the classical singer has her eyes fixed on another dream, to set up a performing arts school named 'Praise and Perform' for poor children in her adopted second home of Namibia.

Emma has recently released a new CD of well-known arias and West End classics, called 'Songs to the Moon'. It features the kind of emotional pieces that suit her 'spinto soprano' voice with the dramatic climaxes that audiences at her concerts love.

With her career as a cross-over soprano blossoming Emma, who attends Norwich's Alive Church, is always keen to tell her audiences about the humble origins of where it all began - crying in a hospital toilet.

Working as a hospital cleaner at the Norwich and Norfolk University Hospital, Emma recalls: "I was praying in the toilet crying: 'please Lord I want to sing, I don't want to be cleaning any more'. Then I came out of the toilet and someone immediately said: "there's this talent competition Emma; you should enter your video."

Emma went on to win the global

'Serco's Got Talent' competition performing the final in a hotel near London's Trafalgar Square against competitors from America, India and Australia.

"He heard my prayer", says Emma, smiling. "And that process is a massive reminder that God hears your heart and He can make anything into anything. I tell that story at my concerts. It takes a leap of faith to tell people that I was a cleaner. All this is because of that."

During the summer of 2017, Emma closed the Royal Norfolk Show by singing the national anthem. She opened the South-burgh World Music Festival in July, performed a host of concerts around Norfolk and Suffolk, and is looking forward to performing with the Norwich Pops Orchestra at a New Year's Day concert in St Andrew's Hall.

Emma also helped Alive Church to design their 'Beauty and the Beast' inspired float which won the Lord Mayor's Procession and she is now the Musical Director of the church's production of the Disney classic to be performed at Easter next year.

"In the last few years I've felt very confident and determined to use my singing, as I feel it is my gift, to help other people," says Emma. "I want to sing to touch

people emotionally but also to use it as a platform to go for my big dream to set up a performing arts school in Namibia."

Emma married her husband, Josef, who is originally from Namibia and who she describes as 'her strength' when she was 18. They have two sons, Taleni and Kleophas.

Emma and her family regularly visit the South West African country of Namibia. She recalls the moment that her dream began to be realised: "We have this piece of land in the most disadvantaged area of Windhoek in Namibia. Josef was joking around saying: 'what shall we turn it into?' And it came to me in a flash. I thought: "this is the performing school."

Emma admits: "I know what it is going to be called; I know what it is going to be like; but I'm not at the stage yet where I know how to fundraise for it. I have moments of doubt about whether my goal will ever get there. How can I come up with so much money? But actually if I just look at how far God has brought me with my previous dream, it is possible."

The Praise and Perform School is inspired by the Namibian children who Emma says: "just start dancing in the street and their foot movements are amazing." The children finish school at 1pm and

in the burning heat of the afternoons are often found playing football bare-footed in rocky mountainous terrain.

"I want to have a place where the children can come and produce music," Emma says. "I picture a stage where they can do productions and where I can teach performance - singing, dancing, acting, painting, creative stuff, ways to express themselves; a place where the children can come and be creative."

Regularly singing to appreciative audiences in the UK, wearing lavish dresses typical of an operatic performer, Emma is aware that she has to keep her eyes fixed on this Namibian dream.

"I feel like I need to focus on what God has put on my heart," Emma says. "I love performing but I have to be careful not to get wrapped up in the whole glamour of it. That's why I always try to remember to tell my testimony when I'm performing - how God has changed my life."

The album, Songs to the Moon, is available to buy for £10 from Emma at emmanuule@gmail.com or from the Aladdin's Cave shop on Magdalene Street in Norwich.

Please contact Emma if you would like to book her to perform, or can help her with her Namibian dream.



New book celebrates 1000-year-old community

■ Three Norwich Christians with an eye for history have produced a well-illustrated hardback called 'The Bowthorpe Book' which traces the history of their community from a small Saxon settlement in medieval times to the development of the new £19 million Care Village, west of Norwich.

The book also celebrates the fortieth anniversary of the first residents moving to modern Bowthorpe which includes the vibrant communities of Clover Hill, Chapel Break and Three Score.

Various residents share their memories in the book which also includes a section on the modern community's beginnings by Ray Simpson, pioneer minister of Bowthorpe Church, which is located alongside the 900-year-old ruin of St Michael and All Angels Church - Bowthorpe's oldest building. It is thought that there has been a Christian fellowship in the area for 1,000 years.

Back in 1978, Ray had a vision for 'one family of Christians for one neighbourhood' and a new church building opened in 1986.

Keen local historian Dave Blake, one of the co-authors of the 140-page Bowthorpe Book, came up with the book idea which he shared with Sally Simpson, sister of the Rev Ray Simpson, founder editor of the Bowthorpe News.

Sally, who for many years was also editor of Bowthorpe News, arranged finance for the project and encouraged Dave to work with the book's main co-writer, Rebecca Domek, "who basically made the book happen with her tireless work," said Sally.

Following strong demand for The Bowthorpe Book, a paperback reprint is planned for the New Year.

Pictured above are main writer Rebecca Domek (left), co-author Dave Blake and project co-ordinator Sally Simpson with The Bowthorpe Book.

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Ex-dentist extracts lots of good humour

■ Well-known Norfolk author, blogger, storyteller and former dentist Dr Barrie Lawrence (right) takes readers on a James Bond-fuelled journey in his recent book *Licensed to Drill - Dentist on the Loose!*



Cleverly playing on the credentials of the legendary British spy, Barrie has weaved an adventure with anecdotes and intrigue from stories across some 40 years' service as a dental surgeon.

This is book number five and the third which comprises light, dental anecdotes. Besides humour, he delves deeper into the history of the everyday workings of dentistry to reinforce his stories of Heroes, Villains and Memorable Others - all written in his engaging and entertaining style.

The tooth sleuth tells of a surprise find in a farmer's mouth during a routine X-ray and asks, "Have you been shot? With a gun that is?" With wide-eyed amazement he responded, "Cor, how do you know that? It was a glancing off shot from a blighter firing out of the trees some ten years ago?"

The movie "Goldeneye" helped ignite requests from customers looking to use gold as a material for restoring teeth and for others to display a glint of gold. Barrie decided to visit the old Soviet Union to see the excesses of upper front teeth crowned with gold and recalls being "followed by our faithful KGB tail - so I kept my mouth well and truly shut," Barrie confesses.

Barrie tells of Chris and Jane, new patients whom he gelled with instantly, and whom owned a thriving double-glazing business. Jane was suffering badly with tooth pain and Chris said to Barrie, "Stop the pain as soon as possible and tell us all that needs doing, and we'll come back, as we are very busy people." There was extensive work required and he quoted £4,250 which Jane responded as sounding awfully expensive. Chris responded, "Expensive? No way. Your mouth is like two windows. The bill is what we get for two windows!"

Barrie has a strong moral compass, reinforced by his Christian faith, and like Bond is hospitable to all he comes across. This book will be loved by his growing following of loyal readers. Available from Jarrolds and Amazon.

Review by Kevin Gotts



Jon Norman speaking at Soul Church in Norwich.

City boy Jon now leads a 1000-strong church

Jon Norman grew up in Norwich, studied in Australia, married an American, helped lead a church in South Africa and now leads a 1000-strong church back in his home city. Mike Wiltshire reports.

Soul Church in Norwich, of which Jon is senior pastor, has plans to build a 1,000-seat church as part of a multimillion pound community complex at Heartsease Lane, Norwich. Phase one of the project will cost £7 million.

Jon (aged 38) and his wife, Chantel, a gifted musician and worship leader, first met at Hillsong Bible College - in Australia where officially dating was prohibited: 12 years later, they are happily married with two children.

Chantel has "an incredible story", said Jon, who told how his wife survived years of abuse in a troubled home in eastern Los Angeles, but found healing and restoration through

forgiving others and personal faith in Christ.

Jon, in contrast, "grew up in a Christian home in rural Norfolk" having made his first decision to follow Jesus at the age of seven.

At 17, Jon played in the Norfolk Christian Football League and was spotted by a scout for Norwich City. He was "invited for trials with some of the big names," only to be crushingly told by a coach: "Son, you're just not good enough! Maybe you'd be OK for Division Three."

However, Jon went on to prosper in business - at 18, he was earning £1,000 a week with a software company in Slough before the firm suddenly closed down. So, with his parents' blessing, he seized the chance to make his first trip to Hillsong Church in Australia in 2001. Later he joined the Hillsong Bible College.

In 2003, Jon was back in Norwich, pioneering the hugely successful 'Wildlife' youth ministry "which really lived up to its name as riot vans were in attendance on opening night, as hundreds of youngsters turned up for free pizza."

Jon's former church, Mount Zion, "really embraced these young people", some of whom have gone on to become youth leaders. Then in 2006, after the church on Heartsease Lane burned down, Jon and Chantel moved to Hillsong South Africa where they helped to establish a church of 12,000. Meanwhile, Mount Zion found a temporary home at Mason's Road, and renamed the church Norwich Family Life Centre (NFLC).

"I have often reminded myself that the God who worked so amazingly in South Africa is the same God we serve in Norwich," says Jon, who is greatly encouraged by the fresh levels of unity among Christian leaders in the city. He

has a passion to see the church at large reaching out to the 900,000 people of Norfolk.

In 2012, Jon was sitting on a couch at home when he "heard God speak into his heart - 'one day you'll have a church called Soul Church'."

Jon had never heard that name before, but then he discovered that the website domain name (SoulChurch.com) was "readily available" for £1,500.

His mum, Gillian, gave him the money to buy it in faith. Since then, Jon has "turned down thousands" from those who would like to buy the domain name from him - as well as invitations to Jon to work for large churches in Canada and the US.

Three and a half years ago, NFLC pastor Trevor Pimlott "passed the baton" on to Jon as leader of the new Soul Church which has grown from 200 people to around 1,100 to 1,200 attending each week.

Canaries fan Jon is also chaplain to Norwich City Football Club and a canon at Norwich Cathedral. Speaking about his own life, he said: "It's not what happens to you but what happens in your heart that defines your life . . . life is too short to hang on to bitterness."

He said he was learning that "it's not what I have in my life, but who I have in my life" - meaning Jesus Christ. Being a public success but a private failure is not a success, especially in the unique calling as a son, husband and father.

"I believe that everyone would live a vastly better life if they knew Jesus Christ . . . the 'arms of the Cross' are a powerful picture of God reaching out to the world. We Christians are called to reach out to those who have not yet heard the Good News of Christ."



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Was vagabond of God a saint?

Known as The Vagabond of God, former Norfolk school-boy **John Bradburne** is the subject of a new biography and a growing movement to have him canonised as a saint. **Keith Morris** reports.

The ex-Gresham's pupil, and son of a North Norfolk vicar, found his true mission in life, after a long search, loving and caring for a colony of lepers in civil war-torn Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) - a role which led him to be murdered by guerrillas.

John was the son of Cawston Anglican vicar, Thomas Bradburne, and as a youth spent time there and also at Gresham's School near Holt.

It wasn't until he was drafted into the British Army in 1940 that religion began to become an influence in John's life. He found faith when death was all around him behind enemy lines with the Chindits, a special operations unit in Burma. He returned to Europe a reluctant hero and started looking for work.

Back home he went through a succession of jobs, including: forester, schoolmaster, stoker on a fishing trawler, grave-digger, street musician, garbage collector, but in time he came to realise that his real vocation lay with God.

In 1947, John joined the Catholic Church, experimenting first with both Benedictine and Carthusian spirituality, before deciding to follow the spiritual path of St Francis of Assisi. He described himself variously as a 'Buffoon of Christ', 'a fool skilled in fiasco', pilgrim, hermit, mystic, drifter and 'rolling stone'.

In 1961, thanks to wartime friend and Jesuit, John Dove, he went to Zimbabwe where he started a new round of odd jobs, as handyman in a Franciscan mission, then warden of a Jesuit residence.

In 1969, John went with a friend to visit Mutemwa Leprosy Centre, where hundreds of lepers, far from receiving palliative care, were simply awaiting death in appalling conditions.

He decided, on the spot, to live among them, soon making himself a friend of one and all. He acted as the lepers' caretaker, nurse, cook and confidante. Mutemwa quickly

became a special place of prayer, peace, laughter and joy, yet sadly this awoke jealousy and suspicion, and he was expelled from the Centre for six months during which time the lepers' lives worsened considerably.

When he was finally allowed to return to live near the settlement, Mutemwa had become caught up in the turmoil of a civil war and atrocities perpetrated by both sides in the conflict.

He was strongly advised to leave for his own safety as guerrilla warfare surrounded Mutemwa. John replied: "Would they waste a bullet on a clown?" He stayed on to care as best he could for the lepers as the situation grew desperate.

In September 1979, John, the only white European left caring for the lepers at Mutemwa, was abducted by young guerrillas, put on trial, found innocent and released but shot dead as he walked back home.

His lasting legacy is that Mutemwa is now a place of pilgrimage, attracting tens of thousands of pilgrims to the place where this 'holy man' lived and worked. Several unexplainable happenings occurred during and after his funeral, including blood seemingly dripping from under his coffin although he had been dead for a week, and people being healed after calling on his name.

There is a growing movement in support of his cause for sainthood - he would be Zimbabwe's first ever saint. There is also the rich legacy of his poetry, of which he wrote more than 6,000 pages.

Biographer, Didier Rance, said: "The life of John Bradburne was so extraordinary and at the same time so deeply



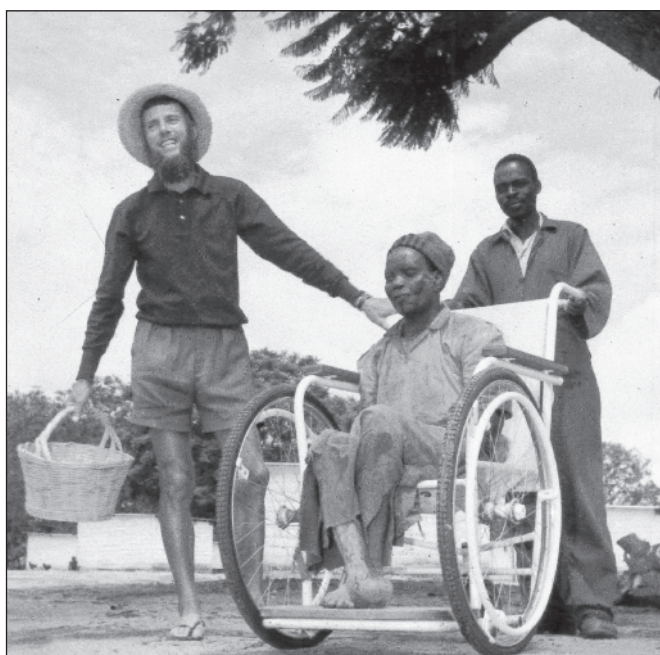
John Bradburne at the Mutemwa leper colony with Peter, above, and Mai Jeromia, below.

and humbly human that it may speak to anyone and give reason to believe in man as well as in God."

Celia Brigstocke, from The John Bradburne Memorial Society, said: "John's cause for beatification is currently under investigation at the Vatican in Rome and in 2019 we will have a big celebration to commemorate his life and 40th anniversary of his death."

The UK edition of John Bradburne: The Vagabond of God, by Didier Rance is sold by The John Bradburne Memorial Society, PO Box 32, Leominster, HR6 0YB, priced at £15 inclusive of postage.

www.johnbradburne.com



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Norwich mystery of war heroine solved

New light has been shone on the mystery Norwich home of World War Two heroine Elsie Tilney, who rescued Jews from the Nazis, following an appeal on the Network Norfolk website and in this paper.

■ Prof Philippe Sands, QC, a London barrister and leading human rights lawyer, who describes Elsie's extraordinary story in his international best-seller, *East West Street*, on the origins of genocide and crimes against humanity, asked for help in finding her Norwich home.

Prof Sands' mother, Ruth, as a year-old baby, was rescued by Elsie Tilney, a Christian missionary, 78 years ago, from Nazi-occupied Vienna and reunited her with her father Leon in Paris.

There, Elsie handed the baby over to Leon, quickly writing her name and Norwich address in pencil on a scrap of paper, two inches square. It said simply: 'Miss E.M. Tilney, 'Menuka', Blue Bell Road, Norwich, Angleterre.'

For more than 60 years, the baby's father, Leon, treasured that slip of paper. After Leon died, the yellowing paper fell out of an old suitcase as Prof Sands was researching his family history. For two years, the scrap of paper hung above his desk as he sometimes wondered about the person who wrote it.

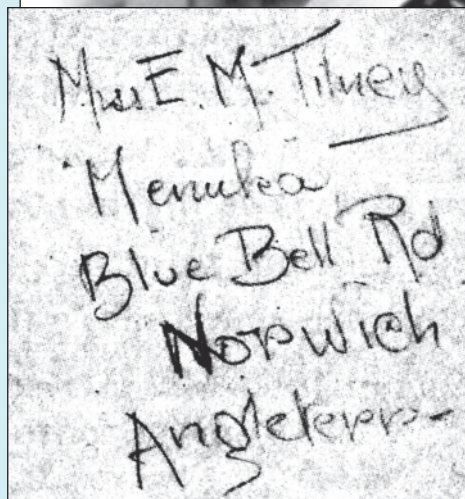
Now, after our appeal, two Norwich historians have come up with vital clues to the mystery address, which no longer exists.

Surrey Chapel historian Dr Rosamunde Codling believes she has located the site of Menuka. She said: "After working on various Surrey Chapel documents, combined with research at the Forum Local History section, I discovered that the house was near the Eaton end of Bluebell Road and was demolished to enable the Cringleford bypass to be built in 1975."

Meanwhile, fellow historian Heather Ramsbottom, who also has links to Surrey Chapel, found mention of Menuka in the 1939 Census.

"In September 1939 the only occupant of Menuka was a Miss Hilda Riches, a spinster in her fifties, a schoolteacher. She inherited the house in late 1938 from a relative - Robert Riches, who died in December 1938, aged 83. There was no mention of Elsie Tilney being there at that time. There seemed to be a row of houses with names and no numbers and then the numbered houses started - presumably it saved renumbering all the houses, though this did happen eventually."

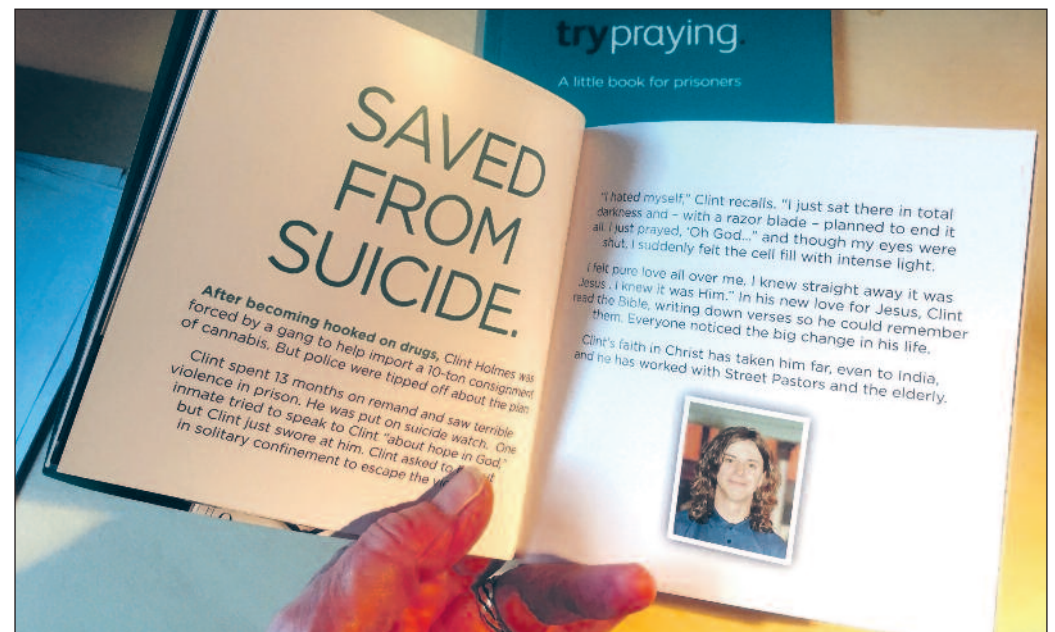
Pictured, from the top, is Philippe Sands, QC, with his mother, who was rescued as a



baby by Elsie Tilney; plus a picture of Elsie Tilney in 1920; and the slip of paper that Elsie gave to Leon after handing over the baby in Paris in 1939.

Prison praye

Twenty million adults in the UK pray – and one in three of us believes that God answers prayer. These are some of the surprising statistics that emerge in a new national campaign called **"Try Praying – there is hope"** which features the compelling story of **Norwich man Clint Holmes**. Mike Wiltshire reports.



Clint's remarkable testimony is featured in the campaign's 'Little Book for Prisoners' – bringing a message of hope to some of the 80,000 men and women behind bars in the UK. His story appears under the headline, 'Saved from suicide' after he saw 'terrible violence' while on remand in prison.

Today, Clint is a free man, now happily married to Lois, and is a key leader in Norwich's Radical Church.

"Every day, when I wake up, I thank God for what he has done in my life," admits Clint. "I thank Him for the basic things and for the adventure of being a follower of Jesus Christ."

But it wasn't always so: in his earlier life, Clint became hooked on drugs and was forced by an armed gang to help import a 10-ton consignment of cannabis in a shipping container – "we know where your family live," they warned him.

Armed Police and Customs were tipped off about the plan, and Clint found himself pinned to the floor in handcuffs, as a police helicopter hovered over the warehouse and police dogs growled at the four suspects involved.

Clint was sentenced to five and half years in prison, but today as a free man he has a passion to reach marginalised people who, like himself, have struggled with addictions and troubled relationships.

The eldest of five children, Clint grew up in a troubled home in Nottingham. As a teenager he longed for a career in football until his dream was dashed by a knee injury. Like many boys on his estate he began drinking at 13 and by 16 was caught up in gangs of angry hooligans. His alcohol tolerance climbed so high, he switched to cannabis and other drugs that gave him a bigger 'high' and rush of confidence.

He managed to hold down several jobs and assisted in a night shelter where he met a Chinese man linked to the Triad criminal network.

Clint, still struggling with drug addiction and failed relationships, was offered cannabis and pure cocaine – and then told, under threat, that he must assist the gang "which was run on fear

and paranoia." The plan was to import a huge quantity of vacuum-packed cannabis into the UK in a container which supposedly contained only candles.

After the failed crime, Clint spent 13 months on remand and saw 'terrible violence' in prison. He was put on a suicide watch to keep an eye on other disturbed prisoners. One inmate tried to speak to Clint 'about hope in God', but Clint just swore at him.

Then he saw a man "beaten to a pulp" as guards turned away – so Clint asked to be put in solitary confinement to escape the violence. "I hated myself," Clint recalls. "I just sat there in total darkness and – with a razor blade – planned to end it all. I just prayed, 'Oh God . . .'" and though my eyes were shut, I suddenly felt the cell fill with intense light. I just felt pure love all over me. I knew straight away it was Jesus . . . I knew it was Him."

A few days later, Bill, a prison chaplain on the 'block' asked: "Does anyone want communion?"

Clint gladly accepted, and in the chaplain's office, he took the sacraments – "it was a very big thing for me."

In his new love for Jesus Christ, Clint avidly read the Bible, writing down chosen scriptures so he could remember them. Prison staff noticed the big change in his life. A rehab manager who had dabbled in the occult became a Christian – and Clint was soon helping in prison chapel services which grew rapidly as more men attended. Clint was so overjoyed by his new-found faith that he was breathalysed in prison to see if he been drinking the communion wine.

He was shocked, however, when a liberal church minister asked him, "You don't actually believe this stuff do you?" This only toughened Clint's resolve to follow Christ and he wasn't bothered when men on the landings shouted, "Here comes the God squad!" as he walked by. Clint, a chapel orderly, became an unofficial prison chaplain – "even the Governor knew it."

Clint today believes that large sections of the church are asleep. "We need a bigger heart for

r brings message of hope



Pop star turned dancer hails positive power of prayer

■ Pop star Alexandra Burke, who won the 2008 X-Factor with the song Hallelujah, has now been taking BBC1's Strictly Come Dancing show by storm as well.

But the multi-talented performer does not take all the credit for herself and says that prayer is central to her pre-performance routine.

Prayer and going to church "helps me be positive, hopeful and thankful - and is a really important part of my life," the 29-year-old told the Radio Times. "There is no joking when it comes to praying - I'm always praying. Because I'm always quite hyper, if I'm silent, it's me praying to myself.

"It is God's support which got me through my performance and will drive me through this competition."

She also describes praying not just for herself but for the whole 'Strictly' team before going out to perform "because it's not all about me".

Alexandra had a very difficult start to the competition back in August when her 53-year-old mother Melissa, a former Soul II Soul singer, died after a nine-year battle against kidney failure brought on by her diabetes, on the same day as the Strictly red carpet launch event.

She wrote on Twitter: "Mummy has always been my biggest supporter and was over the moon when I told her I was doing Strictly... I know that she would have wanted me to carry on."

Pictured left, Alexandra Burke performs with professional dance partner Gorka Marquez. Picture by BBC/Guy Levy.

Order your own free Try Praying booklet at: www.trypraying.co.uk/try-it/booklet/

the community," he says. "There are so many addicts out there. But I'm sticking close to God." His experiences have propelled him to avidly support Radical Church in Norwich. The group meets at various venues for outreach meetings including Frere Road Community Centre in Heartsease and St Stephen's Church in Chapelfield.

Clint has seen God provide for his needs in answer to prayer. His faith in Christ has taken him far afield, even to India, and he has served faithfully with the Street Pastors and has a special regard

for the elderly.

Clint is grateful that his story is included in the 'Try Praying' book for prisoners, as he realises his own prison encounter led to a transformed life. The 'Try Praying' project is a prayer guide with a difference, challenging non-churchgoers to pray for seven days and see what happens. Surprising results are highlighted including a man who prayed: "God, if you're there (and I'm not sure you are) - but if you are, I want to know you. I don't want to fool myself. I really want to know you. Please make yourself

known to me."

Clint's own story of gratitude to God is echoed by an ex-prisoner from HMP Edinburgh who took up the challenge to 'Try Praying. He said: "Life in prison began to get better when I thanked God every day - I started to have an attitude of gratitude."

There are various editions of the 'Try Praying - there is hope' booklets in print and online for adults, young people and for those requiring a large print version. For details, visit the website: www.trypraying.org



Clint Holmes.



Norwich couple Ike and Linda Nnene. Picture by Senpix.

Couple want to bring hope through music

Norwich GP **Ike Nnene** and his teacher wife **Linda**, are dedicated to bringing hope and light to their adopted city through gospel music, wellness clinics and marriage support, reports **Jenny Seal**.

Ike and Linda Nnene continually ask themselves, "how can we make a positive difference to the societal issues we encounter day by day?"

The couple and their teenage children, Benjamin and Alice-Lily, have lived in Rackheath since February 2016. Ike is a GP at Thorpewood Surgery and Linda works as the Head of Law and Politics at the City of Norwich School (CNS) while also

studying for a doctorate in Educational Attainment.

Attendees at Soul Church in Norwich, the couple are dedicated to using their passions, skills and experience to positively influence the local community.

Linda explained: "Ike and I are grateful to God that He has given us positions where we are able to meet people who face difficulty. As a couple we ask ourselves: 'how can we make a difference?', 'how can we have an impact?', 'how can we run programmes that are relevant?'"

One way that Ike and Linda seek to answer those questions is through gospel music. In August, they performed their first annual Power and Beauty Gospel Concert to a packed venue at The Blake Studio in Norwich School, with a band of talented musicians the couple had brought together.

"If I had to describe Gospel music I would say that it is everything positive", Linda said. "It is edifying, it fills the soul. The message is uplifting." Ike agrees: "We just want to praise God, celebrate His goodness and spread the word. Gospel music is liberating, it allows you to overcome obstacles in life."

In 1996, Ike and Linda, who were

living in London, were introduced through a friend, who recognised their mutual love of gospel music and involvement in choirs. Their first date was to see the popular American gospel music artist Hezekiah Walker in concert.

"We are blessed that God has brought us together with a common interest," Linda said. "And we have run with that."

Before settling in Norwich, the couple lived in Beccles where they led the Gospel Choir at the New Life Christian Fellowship Church. During a Christmas Lights Switch On in the town Ike, Linda and friends performed a Christmas gospel concert.

"That is when we could see that people wanted more of this," Linda said. "Music is positivity and when you add the word of God that is a powerful thing."

The couple write and perform their own songs which are available to download from iTunes and Spotify.

Linda said: "When it comes to the lyrics, our words are heavily scripturally based. There are no apologies there." Ike continued: "Every song is able to inspire others, challenge them and encourage them with something positive."

In keeping with their desire to bring hope through gospel music, the couple are also passionate about the principles of positive psychology and health.

Earlier this year, the couple ran a Wellness Seminar at Thorpewood Surgery, open to patients of the Medical Practice.

"The Wellness Seminar was inspired by what I see on a regular basis; my patients that come through the surgery every day," Ike said. "As a GP I see lots of people with mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. And the ability of the existing service is not as entire as we might like. I do value the input of professional services. But our aim is to use the Wellness Seminar as an additional thread of support, to say that you can actually get better."

Ike continued: "I always challenge people to think that they can get better. I encourage the potential to get better because that potential has often been suppressed."

"This session enables people who have been through difficult times to learn about the power of positive confession, to find the ability to forgive and open up to a lifestyle of praise. As well as forsaking bitterness and embracing the positive, we emphasise practical aspects such as exercise and rest."

About the session, Linda explained: "Ike made it quite clear that we were coming as a couple, and as a Christian couple, and people were very receptive to that." The couple would like to develop the Wellness Seminar and are considering opening up sessions on a wider basis within Norwich.

Ike and Linda are clearly an impressive team - they have been married for 21 years. Consequently another of their passions is to advocate for marriage and family life.

Through their work and personal lives they naturally attract people who open up and share with them about their marital situations. Typically Ike and Linda have asked themselves in response, 'how can we help on a wider scale?'

Ike said: "I look at a child taking its first breath today and I ask 'what is the best thing we can do for that child?'. Is it investing in criminal justice or drugs prevention? I believe if that child can be brought up in a secure environment with love and good role models that will offer the best future."

"When the home is stable, people tend to do better. Marriage underpins society. If you have a stable environment, everyone can operate at their optimal level and children can thrive."

In response, the couple have started a YouTube channel, called 'Marriage on Song' with vlogs of the couple encouraging positive marriage relationships.

"Even the Government finds it difficult to talk about the benefits of the family unit," Linda said. "It is only God that will save us in this regard. I see, in my work, that children who come from a broken home inevitably have issues. Our society needs people to say that the family unit is a good thing and we make no apologies about that."

Ike said: "Just encouraging people to take the right step is powerful; creating that hope, that light."

You can find out more about the various ministries of Ike and Linda Nnene and hear their music at: www.ikeandlinda.org.

As we walked through the bluebell woods, I thought he'd like this

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Swaffham TV nuns pass on good habits

Channel 5 reality TV series **Bad Habits – Holy Orders**, took five party-loving, selfie-obsessed, young women and challenged them to live in the Norfolk convent of the **Daughters of Divine Charity** in **Swaffham** for several weeks. **Keith Morris** reports.

It was the first time in 20 years that such a convent has opened its doors to the TV cameras in the UK and the nuns' way of life was a shock, but also eventually an inspiration, to the unsuspecting guests.

Nun, Sr Michaela Switaj, aged 23, was one of the surprise stars of the series, and as the youngest of the Sisters at the convent, was able to identify with the young guests and they, in turn were inspired by her.

"I can relate to them in many ways," said Sr Michaela. "I used to go out a lot drinking with my friends when I was a teenager and thought I was having fun but I just felt more and more empty inside and it didn't really help. It's about showing them there is another way of life and you can have fun without alcohol.

"I used make-up to cover something that I didn't like about myself, I just wanted to rebel," she said.

Talking to the cameras about life in the convent, Sr Michaela, originally from Poland, said: "We are women who are nuns but we still want to have fun in our lives. Even though we are consecrated women we still have many male friends. We don't have romantic relationships with them but we still have friendships with them."

Sr Michaela came to England when she was 18 years old and entered the convent at 19.



Sr Michaela with guest Rebecca at the Sacred Heart Convent in Swaffham during the **Bad Habits** TV series. Picture by Channel 5.

"Since I entered I have felt that this is my vocation and this is where I want to be for the rest of my life. It is a mystery even for us," she said. "When I lived in the world, I had my family and my friends and my school and job but I still felt that there was something missing in my life. I could not find that deep joy which I found when I entered the convent as that was my call and you can't be fulfilled when you don't respond to God's invitation.

"I would love to bring more people to Jesus. I would love to show them that he really does love them because people who I meet every day don't really believe or feel God's love in their lives or is working in their lives and this is what I would love them to know and that is what I want to show them in

my life."

By the end of their time at the convent, all five TV guests had reassessed their view of life and what was important to them, in one way or another.

Rebecca, from Newcastle, decided to train to become a care worker and try to rebuild the broken relationship with her dad. She said: "This has been the best experience I have had and I would probably do it again."

Gabby, from Cromer, said: "It was one of the hardest and most challenging things I have ever done. I might not have come away with a belief in God, but I definitely have more belief in myself and that I can do more than I thought I could."

Tyla is about to start voluntary work with the homeless in Leeds

and Sarah will be drinking less and helping with more household chores.

And the series was also of benefit to the convent.

Sr Michaela said: "It has brought a change to our community because actually the girls, with their presence, brought us together as a community.

"The girls are beautiful and wonderful on the inside as well as the outside. I want them to appreciate themselves for who they really are, not for the masks that they wear."

Sr Francis Ridler said: "It has been a strange and rather wonderful experience actually. Since the series we have been in touch with some of the girls' parents and they are very grateful for the sisters' impact on their daughters' lives."



It was piano love at first sight for Scott

■ It was 'love at first sight' when Scott Morrison was offered piano lessons in Norwich at the age of 12. Now, at 27, he is an amazingly versatile musician, playing at least seven instruments.

Scott was only four years old when his dad, Gordon, died – and as Scott grew up he "didn't enjoy school" but found joy in music as he explored the world of brass instruments and keyboards and eventually earned a place on a music degree at Surrey University.

Today, Scott teaches music at the prestigious Leys School in Cambridge, (boarders £10,600 term), which was founded in 1875 on Methodist Church principles.

The piano is Scott's first love and he also sings bass and plays the organ. He plays guitar and brass wind instruments such as the trombone, tuba and euphonium. He loves a variety of music from Chopin's compositions to jazz and musical theatre. Friends say "Scott can turn his hand to most things," when it comes to playing instruments in various styles.

He was greatly encouraged along his musical journey by the sixth form at Hewitt School and by Margaret Smith, the Norwich music director and choral leader who first heard Scott at a sing-a-long at Trinity Church, Norwich.

Scott has been 'a man of faith' since the age of 16 and Christian values are important to him. Right now he is caught up with seasonal music and he loves the music of John Rutter, the most popular living choral composer in the world and doyen of Christmas music.

This year Scott, with Margaret Smith, hosted an Evening of Musicals with a packed audience and a recent lunchtime-style recital in aid of the organ fund at St Andrew's, Eaton.

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It's good to talk

A couple of days after the terrorist bombing outside the Ariana Grande concert in Manchester in May, a minute's silence was observed by huge crowds gathered in the city's St Anne's Square.

Eldred was there and started talking to a young man he called Adam, aged 22, the same age as the terrorist bomber. He takes up the story...

■ Adam had been sitting for hours in the square, taking it all in. He was heavily tattooed, with pierced cheeks, nose and tongue, and wearing over-sized earphones. One cheek was twitching as he struggled with lonely thoughts. But when I sat next to him, he began to talk.

"I can understand how they drew him in," said Adam. "We see it in the gangs here in Manchester. They always pick on the weakest, most bullied boys. Then they give them somewhere to belong, and they can twist them any way they like."

"I used to have faith as a child," said Adam. "But I lost it. Too many bad things happened to me. I remember 9/11: I was only seven at the time. I started asking: how could a God who is in control allow this? How could he allow this to happen to Manchester? Just look at those kids – they were so innocent."

Adam had grown up in a Christian school, surrounded by Bible stories and crucifixes.

"What about Jesus?" I asked him. "What if God came and suffered with us, with those kids in the bomb attack? Wouldn't He be a God worth believing in?"

"Could I challenge you to say a prayer?" I asked Adam. "Would you pray that if God and Jesus are real, they would reveal themselves to you?"

Adam was silent for a moment, and then in the middle of the square, with strangers sitting all around him, he prayed aloud:

"God, if you are real, reveal yourself to me. Jesus, if you are real, reveal yourself to me. Amen."



Above is Eldred Willey, centre, talking with people at the scene of the Westminster terrorist attack and, below, flowers in St Anne's Square, Manchester.

Norwich man responds when disaster strikes

When disasters such as the Grenfell Tower fire or terrorist attacks have struck the UK in recent months, a Norwich Christian has been among the first to respond, as part of a team of Christian chaplains, offering comfort and help to those affected. Keith Morris reports.

Eldred Willey is part of the Billy Graham Rapid Response team which, this year alone, has supported the grieving community around Grenfell Tower, and offered emotional and spiritual care in the wake of the deadly attacks at Westminster Bridge and London Bridge. In late May, they also ministered alongside local churches after the deadly bombing in Manchester. Eldred has taken part in three of the last four deployments.

"After a disaster, many people are traumatised and bleeding emotionally. Our role is to provide emotional first aid. We believe that by intervening early on, we can help to prevent the development of psychological disorders. As chaplains, we want to encourage others to intervene positively and to pass on the skills needed to do so. It is so important to reach out to people who are suffering, rather than leave them isolated," he said.

"At the darkest times, people ask the deepest questions. It's important to have people who will take time to listen. As chaplains we can't answer the question why. We can't say why disasters happen. But we can often answer the question 'who'? Who can help me in this time of tragedy? We can

point people to human sources of help, and if people want it, we can also help them find comfort in Christ.

"Our Chaplains have found that three-quarters of people they meet in tragic situations are already going through some kind of personal trauma," said Eldred.

In early December, Eldred and others from the Rapid Response team ran a free seminar at the Eastgate Trust in Thrigby, East Norfolk, to teach people from local churches some of the skills they have learned as they respond to tragedy.

"The course aimed to equip people to effectively minister to individuals who are facing bereavement, sickness, grief, relationship loss or other personal traumas," said Eldred.



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Community hub organiser Sarah Avey outside 'the place' in Thorpe St Andrew.



Sarah honoured for key community role

The work at a Norwich church's community hub has been recognised in the Broadland Community at Heart Awards with the accolade of Volunteer of the Year for its main organiser, **Sarah Avey. Keith Morris** reports.

Sarah, aged 50, is the community facilitator at Gateway Vineyard's 'the place' venue in Thorpe St Andrew and her key role was acknowledged at Broadland District Council's third annual awards night on October 12, held at The Space in Sprowston.

The awards celebrate the achievements of Broadland residents who have made an exceptional contribution to their community in 11 categories, from nominations made by members of the public.

The Volunteer of the Year Award was presented to Sarah who, two years ago, gave up

her job as an art therapist with Norfolk & Suffolk Mental Health Trust to take on the key voluntary role of community facilitator at the place in Thorpe St Andrew.

Sarah co-ordinates the work of around 25 volunteers from both the Vineyard church and the local community.

The award citation said: "The place offers local residents of all ages a safe place to go to meet with friends, meet new people, get advice or just take some time for themselves.

Sarah uses her skills to help a wide range of visitors, listening and offering support. She is caring, compassionate and hugely committed to the local community."

Based in a converted shop with a lounge, kitchen, office, prayer space and garden, the place throws open its door at least three days every week to offer a free community café, youth after school drop-in, craft sessions, books swaps, a knit and natter morning and a quiet space for prayer and reflection. Occasional community events include meals, art exhibitions, history talks and craft groups for young people.

Sarah's husband Chris' own work, running a restaurant in

Trowse, supports Sarah's voluntary role after she gave up her own job following "a call from God". She is also quick to point out that she is just one member of a great team which works very well together.

"I felt that giving up my job was the right thing to do at the time – and I now know that it was," she said. "It is a real privilege to be able to volunteer and do a job I really love. I know that God has put me into this role and he sustains me in it.

"I feel that I get back more from the job than I put into it. It is a very healing and peaceful place to work in and there is just something special about being here.

"Members of the Vineyard church often pray and worship here and we can feel the presence of God."

"I totally believe in having somewhere that is just a space for people to come and connect with others or just to be. It is wonderful seeing people make relationships with others."

A fee community lunch is set to be run on Wednesday December 20, from 12 to 2pm.

Everything at the place is free but donations are welcome.

Real lives

The work of Sarah and other volunteers at the place has had a real impact on many of its visitors.

■ A man in his early 40s with multiple sclerosis who has had to retire from work due to disability came looking for answers to spiritual questions.

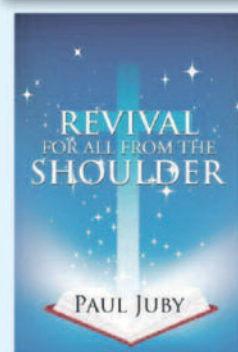
Through the place he has met, and befriended, a man of a similar age who had suffered a head injury.

■ A lady in her 50s who cares full-time for her elderly mother finds the place is somewhere safe, and now familiar, where she can leave her mother when she uses the local hairdressers. The team have also visited her mother when she has been in respite care.

■ A man in his 90s comes alone now that his wife is in a nursing home. He visited the place on their 60th wedding anniversary, and the team were able to give him a celebration with champagne and cake.

■ A teenage boy who is on the autistic spectrum visited the place on a daily basis during the summer holiday. His mum also visits the place. She says she would "fight for the place" because it is the only safe place for her son to socialise outside of school. During the summer holidays, this boy came to the prayer space and had a very positive experience of prayer.

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Fostering a cultural shift

With a disproportionately high number of children living in care, Norfolk is in desperate need of more people to become foster or adoptive parents - people like **Dave and Nicola Ford**, who have provided a home for good for two siblings. **Jenny Seal** reports.



Prior to applying to be foster parents, committed Christians Dave and Nicola attended two 'Home for Good' conferences, which enabled them to meet other foster parents and hear their stories.

Home for Good is a national organisation that seeks to promote a cultural shift, encouraging more people to foster and adopt, and particularly calling for churches across the UK to play an active part in that.

When the Founder of Home for Good, Krish Kandiah spoke at an event at King's Community Church in Norwich recently, he said: "In Norfolk, they are particularly looking for adopters for children aged over three, I am told. Imagine what a difference we could make to these children at that age, rather than wait until the system has spat them out the other end. That is our vision."

Dave agrees: "In other countries people see kids that need homes, and they take them in. It's the culture. Here it's not. But we need to do it. If all the support is in place, fostering shouldn't be quite as daunting and lonely as perhaps it sometimes is. I think that is what Home for Good can do, make it less of a huge thing."

"Fostered and adopted children have lots of needs," Nicola continues. "It's a big commitment to take on. And obviously some people's circumstances don't allow them to do it, so it's not to be taken lightly. But if you can't foster or adopt, you can definitely be a support to others who are doing it. A lot of people feel quite isolated because safeguarding issues make it a bit harder to integrate people. It doesn't have to be huge - it can just be 'I made you a meal'."

Dave and Nicola attend St Thomas Norwich. Nicola works for the church's Sanctuary Café on Grove Walk. Dave, a former Youth Pastor, does a little woodwork and has made the tables for the café. But primarily his time is now spent being available full-time for the children.

"With fostering there are things that fill up your diary, like meetings at school or with social workers, or training that we have to do", Nicola says. "It's really important that Dave is available during the day, because there can be lots happening during the week that's unpredictable."

Dave comes from a family familiar with adoption. His sister has adopted, and his other sister is approved to adopt, so the couple describe it

as, 'in his DNA'. Nicola isn't exactly sure why, but has held a desire to foster since her early 20s, prior to meeting Dave.

"When Dave and I started going out," Nicola recalls, "I didn't mention wanting to foster because you don't want to scare away someone you like. Then one Christmas, Dave proposed and I thought maybe I should mention this, but I still didn't say anything. Then a few days after we got engaged we went for a walk. A few kids ran past and Dave just looked at me and said: 'have you ever considered fostering?'"

"And so we always thought it would be something we would do. But we didn't realise it would be quite so soon into our marriage and pre-having our own children."

The couple found the assessment process less arduous than they expected. It involved eight weekly sessions each lasting 2.5 hours, with meetings covered a wide range of topics including the couple's motivation to foster, their backgrounds, health, finance and support networks. "We were expecting it to be pretty full on," Dave says. "But we were pleasantly surprised."

Dave and Nicola agree that their Christian faith has been a large inspiration in fostering. Dave said: "Fostering is just at the heart of God's mission. The Gospel is full of God adopting us into his family. So it's kind of a no-brainer in terms of 'does it line up with our faith?'"

Nicola agrees: "It is totally what God's heart is about. You don't need God to tell you to do it because it is right there in the Gospel."

Their faith in God has also been a source of strength over the past year. Dave said: "We've found that lots of times we are quite stumped, we don't know what to do, we are tired and we don't have the answer."

"And seeing God come through has strengthened our relationship with God in ways that wouldn't have otherwise happened. Fostering stretches you in lots of healthy ways."

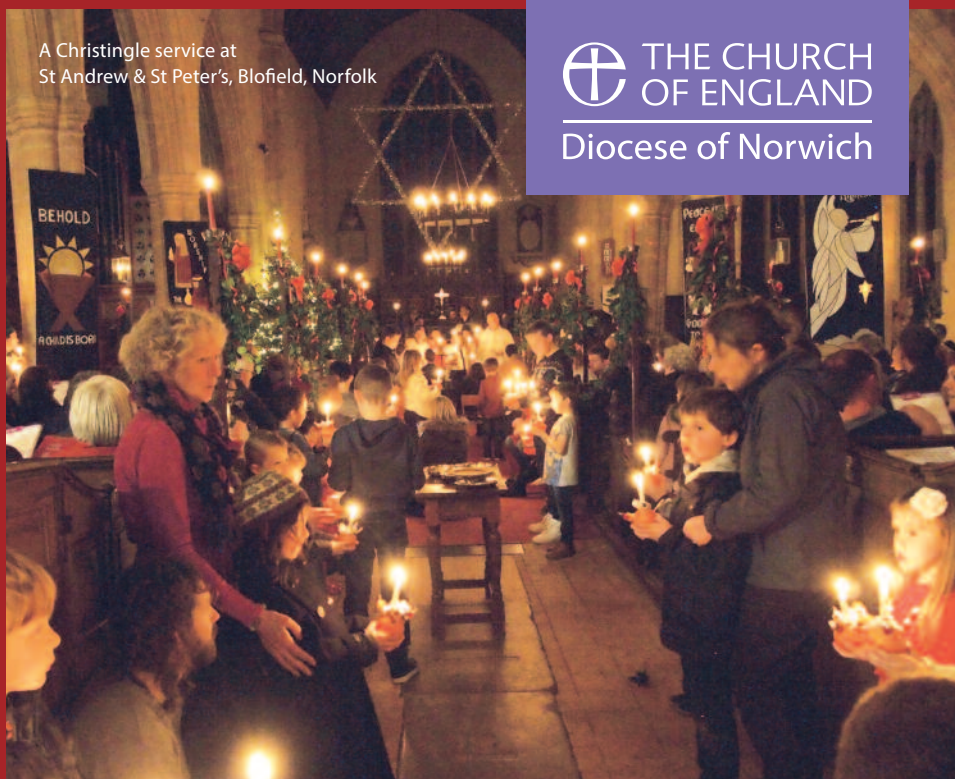
If you are interested in finding out more about adopting or fostering in Norfolk you can visit:

www.norfolk.gov.uk/children-and-families/adoption-and-fostering

The Home for Good website, www.homeforgood.org.uk, has resources for individuals and churches seeking to support families that foster and adopt.

A Christingle service at
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