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Bear Grylls talked about his adventure of faith, what helps him in the challenging moments of life and his own Everest experience, at Soul Church in Norwich, during his first-ever visit to the city. **Keith Morris** reports.

Pictured is Bear Grylls speaking at Soul Church in Norwich. Picture © Soul Church.

## Bear reveals life of adventure and faith

Two things have really shaped my life," Bear told a 1000+ strong audience of church members, scouts and fans of his TV shows on January 9.

"The first of them is adventure and the second of them is faith. But the truth is, those two words are really one and the same thing.

"When I first joined the military as a young soldier, and eventually went on to serve in the British Special Forces, I always remember a soldier came up to me and said this – 'there are three things in life to have faith in. The first is yourself, the second is each other and the third is the Almighty.'

"I always remember that, I always kind of liked it. But what does faith really mean? How can faith be relevant to our sometimes difficult lives? How can faith guide us? How can it really empower us?

"Because the truth is, whenever it is going great, it's easy to think that we don't need anything. But what happens then is that life often comes along and hits us hard," said Bear.

"Life tests us and asks you questions. And whoever we are, if our foundations in life are shaky, we fall down, and I've seen that so often in my life.

"I've seen this often in the wild as well. You know, you take people into the jungle and desert or the mountains, and everyone thinks they're strong, until they're not. You know, myself included, the wilds are a very humbling place. It is a universal truth that whoever we are, life will test us.

"Your Everest if you like, will always come. And it might be a physical mountain, but it might be a mountain of the heart. Maybe, you're maybe having a tough time – at home or at work. Maybe something worse, like we lose someone close to us.

"But whatever it is, our Everest in our life will always, always come."

Bear reached the top of Mount Everest in 1998, at the age of 23, becoming one of the youngest Britons to do so at the time, just 18 months after breaking his back in a parachuting accident.

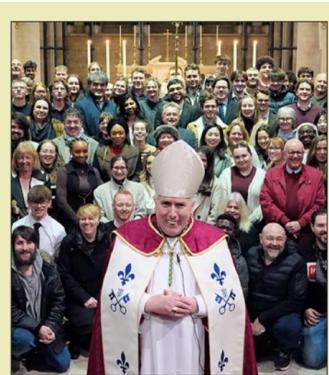
"It took us, I think it was 65 days to climb," said Bear. It was steep and cold

and the summit was like a small little coffee table. Minus 45 degrees. But that high hostile mountain, also took its toll. We lost four climbers lives whilst we were up there, two died of the cold and two fell to their deaths. And to be honest, on that mountain, I experienced many moments of struggle and doubt, as I did moments of eyes wide open.

"People often ask me, what helped you up there? What's helped you since in so many of these deserts, jungles, mountains and oceans? And the answer goes back to that soldier, and that word. That word is faith. I think especially faith in each other. And especially faith in the Almighty. Because I've learnt that on my own, despite what the TV always makes out, I'm actually pretty weak. You know? But when we're connected to something bigger, we get stronger.

"I've leant on my faith so much over the years, and in so many moments. Not just in the day job, trying to get out of quicksand, or rapids or avalanches, or rockfalls, and crevasses, and parachute

■ Continued on page 2.



Bishop Peter at the Rite of Election.

## Large numbers join church

The number of candidates preparing to be received into the Catholic Church across England at Easter is at its highest level for 15 years, including in the Diocese of East Anglia.

■ On the First Sunday of Lent, February 22, the Cathedral of St John the Baptist in Norwich was filled to capacity as The Rt Rev Peter Collins, Bishop of East Anglia, led the Rite of Election and Affirmation for the Diocese of East Anglia.

This year's celebration was marked by particularly large numbers. The cathedral was full with those preparing to be welcomed into the Church, accompanied by their godparents, sponsors, families and parish communities. Many more from across the diocese, unable to attend in person, are also preparing for reception into the Church at Easter.

A spokesman for the Diocese said: "The same encouraging pattern has been seen throughout the country, with dioceses across England and Wales reporting significant numbers at their own Rites of Election, a powerful sign of the Holy Spirit at work in our time."

"The large numbers gathered at the Cathedral were a visible and heartening sign of growth and renewal within the Diocese of East Anglia. At a time when faith can often seem fragile in wider society, the sight of so many adults freely choosing Christ and his Church speaks of hope."

During the Rite of Election, candidates make public commitments to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church in the final stage of their preparation. They will be fully received into the Church in their local churches during the Easter Vigil Mass.

Dioceses across the country are also reporting increases. The Diocese of Westminster has seen a 60% rise, and the Diocese of Southwark is also reporting its highest number in 26 years.

# Pastor role for family after traumatic journey

Norwich-born **Alan Howes**, along with his wife **Lindsay**, who both suffered a catastrophic trauma when their young son was run over four years ago, has been appointed as the new Pastor at **Emmanuel Church Aylsham**. **Tony Rothe** reports.



Alan Howes with wife Lindsay and son Nathanael.

**S**peaking about this new role, which started in February, Alan said: "I am both excited and humbled to be able to step into the role of Pastor at Emmanuel Church Aylsham. Four years ago my world fell apart and I could see no way forward. I thought I had nothing to give but the Lord had other ideas. He is a master at raising us up out of the ashes."

"Emmanuel Church Aylsham is a wonderfully warm close-knit family with a vision and passion to move forward into all that God has for us this year and beyond. It is an immense privilege to have this opportunity to help lead and shape the church spiritually and a challenge that Lindsay and I do not take lightly. We are thankful to God for this opportunity and His mercy to bring us to this place."

In April 2022, immense tragedy struck the Howes family when their then seven-year-old son Nathanael was run over by their own car in a split second accident, suffering severe life-changing head and brain injuries. During the past four years, Alan, Lindsay and their daughters Gabriella 25 and Leila 20 have poured everything into Nathanael's recovery journey. Nathanael, now 11, still continues to make miraculous progress as he relearns to walk and talk again.

Alan and Lindsay first became familiar with Emmanuel Church Aylsham when they were invited to speak in 2023

and share their trauma suffering journey. As they attended and became more involved in the church, they felt God was enabling them and encouraging Alan into his passion and gifting in teaching and leading.

Alan says: 'When the opportunity of the Pastor position became available I felt it was time to take a step of faith forward again after all we have been through. It wasn't enough just to stay in maintenance mode and try and cope each day. I felt the Lord say that I needed to find purpose in the pain. A big part of that was setting up a website, [strengthinsuffering.com](http://strengthinsuffering.com) to enable us to share from our hearts what had happened but also writing blogs to share with others scripture, hope and encouragement that we have found along the way.'

Alan was officially inducted into his Pastor role on February 7 in a special inauguration service attended by over 70 people from Emmanuel Church, family, friends and from representatives from

six other churches in Aylsham town. The service was led by Emmanuel Church Elder Byron Jones. Retired Baptist Minister, David Adams, brought an encouraging message from the book of Acts chapter 20:27-28 and his own personal experience in church leadership. David shared about the importance of teaching the whole counsel of God as well as ensuring time is taken to care for self and others when serving and teaching. Long standing friend of Alan and Lindsay, Paul Thompson McHenry, read from 1 Peter 5:1-4

"We are very much looking forward to working together with the other churches in Aylsham", says Alan. "there is a great sense of community with some wonderful work already going on and to be a part of that and lead Emmanuel Church forward in the community is such a blessing".

To learn more about Emmanuel Church Aylsham or to contact Alan please visit [emmanuelaylsham.com](http://emmanuelaylsham.com) or email at [ECAPastor@outlook.com](mailto:ECAPastor@outlook.com)

## Bear's life of adventure

■ Story continues from page 1. things. But also in life – in the good times, but also in the less good times.

"I've just learned to lean on the beautiful presence of Christ within. And it's always there and it's quiet, and it's empowering. And it's never, never let me down. But that's not to say that it makes life easy. I wouldn't want you to think that. It is not true. To be honest, it's

made for many battles and many struggles. And many doubts as well. It's just part of the journey of life.

"I really, really have many, many moments of doubt when it comes to my faith. But then, I've learned this is okay. It's like two sides of the same coin, faith and doubts – you can't have one without the other. At other times, I've tried to go it on my own – and I've survived for a while, but on our own, we can never be fully empowered – time and experience has taught me that. It's like. Having that light inside is actually the starting point of all true adventure.

"My mum used to say: 'Man is never as tall as when he kneels down'. "And I always love

those words – but it's hard, life is a humbling journey," said Bear.

"I once stumbled across a little chapel, high up in the mountain woods, in a remote part of the world – thick walls, old door, no lock. There was no one inside, and at the far end, there was this old hewn rough wooden cross.

"As I sat there, I noticed that there were some words, and I went up and I read it. It said: 'Christ within me, Christ beside me. Christ to shield me and Christ to win me'. Super simple and beautiful, humble words, but words that have helped me so much, quietly in my life. And it's why I say those two things. Adventure, and faith, are one and the same."

# Prayer is source of our power

Prayer is in the very DNA of Norwich and has been for hundreds of years, says 24-7 Prayer movement founder and author **Pete Greig**, who spoke at several meetings at **Soul Church** in the city in February. **Keith Morris** reports.

**P**rayer is the secret source to our power as Christians. It is the fuel for the fire and the single greatest calling we can have," said Pete, who was in Norwich to speak at Soul Church services, including a prayer evening to which Christians from across Norfolk were invited.

"The invitation to intimacy with God through the priority and power of prayer is at the heart of our mission. It is also the bit of the great commission which, if we are not careful, we omit. Prayer is the ignition for the mission."

Speaking about how the 24/7 prayer ministry began, Pete said: "It all started in a prayer room which we held night and day for a month. At the end we could not stop because miracles kept happening and angels appeared in the prayer room. We also started to see the pain and lament in our community – the agony that people bring to God in prayer.

"We could not stop and have now been praying non-stop since September 5, 1999. We are now in almost every nation on earth. It has been an amazing ride."

Speaking of the relationship between prayer and mission, Pete said: "The church walks on two legs – proclamation of the Gospel and prayer. If you are trying to do mission without prayer you are hopping – you ain't going to go very far. You need both legs working properly to go anywhere.

"The Body of Christ has always marched on these two legs – just look at the Acts of the Apostles. When God's people push us into prayer, mission results. Your job is to focus on the Lord and the Lord will focus you on the lost."

There is also a particular call on some people to be intercessors, spiritual warriors for the nations, said Pete.

"Prayer is in the very DNA of Norwich. In 1096, Norwich Cathedral began as a house of prayer – a Benedictine monastery. In the 11th century, Norwich was one of the leading pilgrim destinations in all of Europe. People came here to pray.

"In the 14th century Julian of Norwich was the first woman to write a book in the English language. In the 15th century there was the great movement of the non-conformists, Thomas Bilney – an extraordinary man, born here in Norfolk. He said salvation comes from faith in Jesus Christ, not through works. For that, the Bishop of Norwich had him killed at Lollards Pit, when he would not recant on what we all know now to be true.



Pictured is Pete Greig speaking at Soul Church in February. Picture by Soul Church and Keith Morris. Hear Pete Greig speak at Soul Church's morning service: [www.youtube.com/@SOULChurchUK](http://www.youtube.com/@SOULChurchUK) [www.24-7prayergb.com](http://www.24-7prayergb.com)

"When people ask about Soul Church don't tell them about this building, which is very cool, but tell them about caring for the poor, preaching the Gospel, tell them about baptisms and families being restored, because I am not sure God cares about our brands."

Later in the day Pete and Brian Heasley, International Prayer Director for 24-7 Prayer, who lives in Norfolk, led a prayer night which involved churches and Christians from across Norwich and Norfolk.

There were prayers for the situation in Iran, prayers for schools, workplaces, churches, streets and families. There was prayer for revival amongst the young and for churches throughout the region, for Alpha courses and church leaders,

There was also the opportunity to join together with people from different churches and to pray for one another.

## GOOD NEWS

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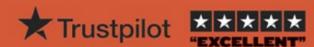


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# Queen's Nurse serves community

Salvation Army Parish Nurse in Sheringham, **Nia Heycocks**, was recently awarded the title of Queen's Nurse, recognising her outstanding commitment to community nursing. **Tony Rothe** reports.



Nia, left, was presented with her award by Karen Bonner MBE, Chief Nurse, NHS England, London (Photo: Queen's Institute of Community Nursing).

Nia qualified as a nurse in 2002 at the University of Wales in Bangor. She worked in several hospitals around the UK, including Ysbyty Glan Clwyd in North Wales, Deriford Hospital in Plymouth and Addenbrookes Hospital in Cambridge, then took several years out of nursing whilst her children were growing up.

She returned to community-based nursing when her youngest daughter began full-time education, working in a nursing home in Sheringham, and became a Parish Nurse for the Salvation Army in Sheringham in 2022.

Nia says: "I enjoy the freedom that I have as a Parish Nurse. It enables me to work alongside the local GP practices, social services, pharmacies and many other local organisations. It also enables me to work on interesting projects which support our local community. Last summer, I ran a campaign about the importance of skin protection aimed at local roofers and builders. I am now planning my next project for this year, working alongside local bicycle shops promoting a 'Healthy Helmet' campaign to improve road safety."

Nia received her award from The Queen's Nursing Institute (QNI) late last year. It is a recognition that the holder demonstrates high standards of practice, leadership and a strong commitment to placing the patient at the centre of care. As a Parish Nurse Nia works closely with local GP practices, hospitals, pharmacies, social

services and local groups offering support that focuses on physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing.

She said: "It is a great privilege to serve my local community in Sheringham as their Parish Nurse. I serve as an

additional layer of support for individuals of all ages and backgrounds, of any faith or none and I offer holistic care that encompasses physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. I am able to prevent hospital admissions by identify-

ing and supporting people who are at risk of admission or have early signs of conditions like high blood pressure. I am also able to support people with mental health issues on their recovery journey. I provide people with health education and promote healthy lifestyles in order to help prevent diseases.

"Guiding and advocating individuals with chronic conditions, alongside their families and caregivers, is a crucial part of my role. The support that I am able to offer my patients at the end of their lives is greatly valued and ensures that not only their needs are being met but their loved ones are also receiving support and help at a particularly difficult time in all their lives."

She is registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council and holds a current DBS check. As Sheringham's Parish Nurse, Nia provides personal health advice, advocacy, and support with navigating treatment plans and accessing appropriate care. While she does not offer clinical treatments such as dressings or injections, she works closely with local GP surgeries, hospitals, and pharmacies to ensure individuals receive the care they need.

Nia concluded: "As a Parish Nurse working within the Sheringham community I always encourage people to seek support. Many people are lonely and isolated in our towns and local communities and we must encourage each other to seek support as and when needed. There are many wonderful support agencies and resources available and as a Parish Nurse it is my privilege to be able to signpost people to support they often don't even realise exists."

For more about Nia's duties with Sheringham Salvation Army, visit: [salvationarmy.org.uk/sheringham](http://salvationarmy.org.uk/sheringham)

For more details about Parish Nursing visit: [www.parishnursing.org.uk](http://www.parishnursing.org.uk)

## Sleep Easy highlights homelessness

This year's YMCA Norfolk Sleep Easy event on Friday March 6 saw an inspiring show of compassion and action from young people across its community.

With over 15 young people taking part alongside adult supporters, their commitment shone brightly throughout the night.

Marketing & Fundraising Manager, Susie Knights, said: "While Sleep Easy does not attempt to replicate the real and often traumatic experience of sleeping rough, it offers a stark introduction into the harsh realities faced by those who are forced to sleep on the streets every night. The event aims to raise awareness and generate vital funds to support YMCA Norfolk's work with young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

"This year our young participants truly stepped up. Their willingness to brave the cold, give up their comforts, and stand in solidarity with those in need is nothing short of inspiring. They remind us that the next generation is already leading the way in building a more understanding and supportive community."

Youth leader Pete Skivington from Sheringham Lighthouse church, brought 12 young members of their youth group for a fourth annual visit and said: "Our young people really value doing something practical and meaningful rather than just talking about the issue of homelessness. Sleeping out helps them engage with the reality in much more powerful ways."

Donations can still be made at: [www.justgiving.com/campaign/ymcansleepeasy2026](http://www.justgiving.com/campaign/ymcansleepeasy2026)

# Phil's passion for finding peace

Phil Gazley has travelled to over 30 countries, camped in the Arctic, and trained Albanian police detectives on human trafficking. God has been close to him throughout his adventures, giving him a passion for helping others find peace. **Helen Baldry** reports.



Phil Gazley leading a workshop at Connect Norwich at Oak Grove Chapel in Norwich in January.

Born in Essex, Phil wasn't raised in any kind of faith, and his only experience of church was holding the St George's flag in a parade when he was a cub scout. However, Phil was naturally inclined towards injustice as a child. He cared deeply about issues such as apartheid in South Africa and believes his desire to confront injustice was placed in him by God.

Musically talented, Phil toured across Canada with a country rock band and he encountered God for the first time when someone started sharing their Christian faith with him. Phil found himself in his hotel room in Lloydminster in Alberta on his knees. He said: "At dawn as the sun was coming out, I said 'God, if you're real, then I have done some stupid things to hurt you and I'm sorry about that. If you are real, then please come into my life.' That was my prayer. I was completely changed."

Over the following six weeks, Phil read the entire Bible and a love of scripture has remained in him decades later. Phil attended a YWAM discipleship school, where he met his wife, Caren. He said: "I couldn't do all I've done without her. She's been my saving grace."

Before they were married, Phil lived in a poor Colonia in Mexico and then started a campus ministry at the university in Calgary. Phil talks about how some people are pioneers and some are settlers. The challenge for a pioneer is to know when you have stayed too long and started to settle. Phil says he has made mistakes along the way, but has always trusted in God's guidance, and has amazing testimonies of how God has worked through situations.

A move to England was part of a long-standing involvement with Vineyard church, with Phil and Caren pastoring a church in Truro in Cornwall.

Phil later lived in America where he worked in anti-human trafficking for 20 years, which involved supporting refugees, asylum seekers and giving law enforcement training in the US and Albania.

Phil supported workers dealing with serious human rights abuses in Romania, Moldova and Ukraine. This was during the development of a new work in California. He co-founded a regional coalition organisation working together to fight human trafficking. At risk youth and children from the foster care system self-referred as victims. The challenging work took its toll. Phil said: "We made a difference, but even though I was trying to take care of myself, I hit a wall and had secondary trauma. I needed to stop - and I did - eventually."

Phil had therapy and was able to take a sabbatical, and he credits his family for support he received.

One of the more unusual locations Phil has travelled to is Svalbard, an Arctic island North of Norway that was part of communist Russia. It was 1988 and Phil and another missionary rented a boat to sail to the mining town of Barentsburg. They were picked up by Russian police, taken into a room with a statue of Lenin in it and grilled for an hour and a half. The exchange ended amicably, with an official receiving a Russian bible and Phil leaving with English versions of the early documents of Gorbachev's perestroika ideas - which he still has to this day.

Phil and Caren moved to Norwich to be closer to family, and four years ago Phil joined Peace Catalyst, a registered charity focusing on building peace in communities. Peace Catalyst specialises in bringing people together across lines of difference. Phil said: "We listen to people's stories to seek to understand. It is possible to make connections, even from dramatically different experiences. There can be unexpected and sometimes delightful collaboration." Phil says that positive peace involves transformation, not only for an individual, but for a whole community.

Scripture is saturated with God's heart for peace - the word 'peace' is mentioned over 400 times in the Bible. The concern Phil felt about injustice - years before he even knew about Jesus - was placed there by God: "Bringing peace, addressing injustice, loving our enemies and our neighbour are all key aspects of our worship and a big part of what it means to live a holy life with God."

If you are interested in Christian peace building courses or would like Phil to speak at your church please, email [phil.gazley@peacecatalyst.org](mailto:phil.gazley@peacecatalyst.org) [www.peacecatalyst.org/norwich](http://www.peacecatalyst.org/norwich)



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Emma Nuule appearing on Britain's Got Talent. Picture by Talkback Thames / ITV.

## Worship leader Emma wows judges on Britain's Got Talent

Norwich church worship leader **Emma Nuule** wowed judges – including Simon Cowell – with an audition on Britain's Got Talent at the end of February – gaining a standing ovation and four yesses from the judges. **Keith Morris** reports.

■ Emma, 38, won over the judges and audience with her operatic performance of Nessun Dorma, the well-known aria by Giacomo Puccini.

Emma, who is a music leader at The Redeemed Christian Church of God, The Chapel Outreach, Norwich, works as a special educational needs support teacher but regularly performs around the city, including busking on the street.

The soprano singer performed a rendition of Nessun Dorma – an aria from

Giacomo Puccini's opera Turandot which was popularised by Luciano Pavarotti – for judges Simon Cowell, Alesha Dixon, Amanda Holden and new permanent judge, KSI.

In the past, Emma has performed at events such as National Film Awards, the British Restaurant Awards and the Golden Lion Awards.

Emma's Christian faith is very important to her. She said: "Before I go on stage I pray for God to take control, to give me strength.

"On BGT especially, I was praying for him to shine through me. I have been praying for a very long time to be on such a big stage on TV to get my dreams across. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

She added how incredible the feedback from the judges felt.

"People in the audience were standing up and cheering. It was so emotional to

get such a powerful response from people."

Simon Cowell, who has been a judge on the show for almost 20 years said: "Normally with that song, I prefer guys when they sing it, but I have to say you did a really really good job. A seriously good job."

Musician and YouTuber KSI gave her high praise, saying: "I felt it down my spine, it was so good."

Hosts Ant and Dec also joined in calling her "special" and complimenting her singing.

Emma gained all four 'yesses' from the judges, meaning she will go through to the next round of the talent show.

She said: "It went incredibly and I was very much in shock and overwhelmed."

Her audition featured in Britain's Got Talent: Unseen, which is available on ITVX.

Article extracts from EDP24.

# Priest's pioneering voyage to a CBE

**Christina Rees** is a priest, writer, speaker, broadcaster and charity director now living and working in North Norfolk. But her story starts around 3500 miles away on Long Island in the USA, and is filled with faith experiences. **Tony Rothe** reports.

**C**hristina was born on Long Island in the USA. Her father was a publisher, and her mother was a teacher and musician. They were both American and both Christians. So Christina describes herself as a "cradle Christian", and has always seen God in her life.

When she was five, the family sold their home and moved onto a bright yellow schooner called Tappan Z, a ten-year-old, 38-foot, two-masted sailing boat, which seemed to require constant maintenance. The family – Christina, her parents, sister Robin, brother Joel and a cat – set sail on a journey that was to last over seven years. For Christina it was a child's world, full of strange sights and adventure, and despite the cramped quarters, the occasional discomfort, and the transitory nature of childhood friendships, it was a wonderful way to grow into her teen years.

They sailed along the coast of America, then stayed in Florida for two years, then on to the Bahamas, where they stayed for a further four years. Throughout that time, the children were home schooled, and the family enjoyed a somewhat Bohemian lifestyle, but very much within a strictly Christian framework, with grace always said before meals, regular evening prayers, and singing hymns throughout the day. Christina would spend her days writing poetry, singing, praying, and thinking about God. As she explains, "There's not much else to do when you are sailing across the sea!"

Her book describes some of her exciting, but sometimes terrifying, experiences, such as sailing through hurricanes (five times), and experiencing severe thunderstorms with, on one occasion, lightning coming from her fingers. However, the family always survived, and Christina is convinced that God saved them. The family even managed to miraculously out-swim a group of sharks that was chasing them, when fishing for supper, which Christina attributes to divine intervention.

Christina's teenage years were spent back on Long Island, where she attended a private school, with much emphasis on drama, acting, singing, and writing. When attending a charismatic prayer meeting run by her aunt and uncle, Christina experienced a waterfall of light and love – inside and



Rev Christina Rees, above, preaching in St Albans Cathedral, right receiving her CBE from King Charles, below with her brother and sister on their childhood adventure and, left as director of the Li Tim Oi foundation.

outside – and a firm confirmation that she was loved by God. When recounting this later to the congregation, including her parents, at her old church on Long Island, she felt as though she was on fire inside, and realised that God had given her the gift of preaching.

A BA in English and the Performing Arts followed, and then a year in New York city, then she moved to Virginia to work as a dance instructor and assistant chaplain in a girls' school, although by now she was also training to become an opera singer.

Christina recounts a further God experience which occurred during a railway journey: "I saw a picture with an ornate frame, which represented my faith, containing all the things I was doing – drama, music, dance etc. Then the picture suddenly changed, and faith was in the middle of the picture. I then knew that I should re-direct my career towards God."

She met Chris, her husband-to-be, when studying for a post-graduate degree in Theology and Communications in the UK, and their friendship developed. She travelled back to USA, where Chris came over and proposed to her. They married in America, then returned to the UK to

begin their married life together, near Cambridge, where they had two children and ran a smallholding for 25 years, with a variety of animals. During this time, Christina started broadcasting and writing and leading worship at a local church in Hertfordshire.

In 1990, she was the first American woman to be elected to General Synod of the Church of England, where she stayed for 25 years, campaigning for women's ordination and leading the campaign for women bishops. She also achieved an MA in Women and Religion at King's College in London.

Christina was asked in 1991 to record a "Thought for the Day" for Radio 4, and continued doing these for 16 years.

Hundreds of interviews on radio and TV and public debates followed, and she was invited to preach at Westminster Abbey, Canterbury Cathedral, St Pauls, St Alban's Cathedral, Manchester Cathedral and many others. She also took part in TV broadcasts for Rowan Williams' enthronement as Archbishop of Canterbury, and the reburial of Richard III amongst other events.

Over the years, she has been a freelance public relations consultant, led retreats and quiet days, and written a number of books. She has attended con-

ferences at UN, and is frequently asked to comment in the media on ethical and moral issues and about Christianity. A high point in her life was being awarded CBE (Commander of the British Empire) in 2015 for 'Services to the Church of England'.

Christina and Chris moved to Sheringham nine years ago, when they bought a house from Chris's sister. Christina believes she has always tried to follow what God was calling her to do, and was ordained as a deacon in 2021 and as a priest in 2022.

She is now a self-supporting minister in the Church of England, but she continues her writing, speaking, and broadcasting whilst husband Chris provides IT support having retired from the BBC.

Christina has a passion for helping women overcome barriers and obstacles and achieve their ambitions, and she is a director of the Li Tim Oi foundation, which she joined as a trustee nearly 30 years ago. The movement is named after the first Anglican woman to be ordained, Florence Li Tim-Oi, in China in 1944, and equips women around the world with educational grants so they can follow their calling.

She is now the Associate Priest at St

Peter's Church in Sheringham, preaching and presiding at services, along with her ministry team colleagues. She also takes part in events with other Christian churches in Sheringham, like the Good Friday walk of witness and the Remembrance Day service, organises bake stalls at St Peters, takes services in local care homes and assemblies at Sheringham Primary School.

"My involvement with BeachLife, a week of outreach to children, young people and their families each August, and school assemblies bring me great delight because I love engaging with children" she says.

For a few years Christina was the chaplain at a local independent school, which, she says, was a wonderful experience.

"My vision for the local community is for everyone to know they are welcome at St Peter's, or to stop me in the street to talk about what's on their mind. It's good to gather together and be part of a supportive, loving community.

"I want the folk I meet to know that God is Love and that God is always right here, with us, wherever we are and whatever our circumstances. All we have to do is to trust that and open ourselves to being in God's presence."

# Norwich minister is a real geek

New Superintendent Minister of the Norwich Methodist Circuit, **Rev Tom Osborne**, has an interest in how the Church and Christian faith interacts and overlaps with aspects of modern culture, including music and geekery.

As well as his ministry experience, and his links with the wider institutional church (both within and outside of Methodist), Tom brings with him an interest in how the Church and Christian faith interacts and overlaps with aspects of modern culture. This is particularly lived out through his involvement in the Friday Fix music blog ([thefridayfix.home.blog](http://thefridayfix.home.blog)), and the Faith & Geekery online community ([cybersten.co.uk/faith-geekery](http://cybersten.co.uk/faith-geekery)).

The first of these is a curated blog, where each Friday a reflection on a (usually) secular piece of music is published. These reflections, from a range of people, come from a faith perspective, finding God present in songs written and released in a non-religious manner. Sometimes the faith-links are obvious and deep, sometimes they're subtle and light.

When asked about the project, Tom said: "My involvement came through a conversation with the curator, talking about my own experiences with using secular music in worship – something I've reflected on academically. I was invited to offer some pieces, and since



Rev Tom Osborne and, below, his geeky space.

then I've offered quite a few, reflecting on music from a broad range of artists, from Johnny Cash to Foo Fighters, and from Massive Attack to Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young." Asked about the geekery interest, Tom

said: "At its start, Faith & Geekery was simply a streamed podcast about various 'geeky' things, such as Role-Playing Games, Lego, fantasy and sci-fi literature, run by Methodist colleagues, which I happened to stumble upon, but it's grown to be much more than that. "The livestreamed podcast continues in an almost weekly format, of which I am one of a cast of hosts. But we've also built up a community, especially on Discord, that is ecumenical in terms of both faith and geekiness. One of our hosts gets very geeky about cows, and we've had episodes exploring the geekiness of watches, of food, and of household chores (what, for example, is the correct way to iron a shirt?) We have great fun, and our inclusive approach has seen growth in this faith-based community over the past 2-3 years."

Tom says of his own geekiness: "My own geekiness expresses itself most clearly in a love of Lego, the playing of sci-fi and fantasy tabletop games of various kinds, and a love of all things Terry Pratchett. But I also get great joy from hearing and seeing others be passionate about their own geeky passions, and exploring where we can meet God, discover more of God, and share God in and with those passions.

"Some of our community now work directly with the Methodist Church's Evangelism & Growth team in order to take Faith & Geekery to events such as 3Generate (the Methodist Church's national youth event), Greenbelt, and a variety of Comic Cons."

While Tom's daily ministry is very much focused on, and rooted in, the churches in Norwich, he's very much looking forward to where online ministry in the context of Faith & Geekery will also lead in the coming months and years.

## Tom's move to Norwich

■ Tom moved to Norwich last year from Manningtree in Essex, where for eight years he served as Superintendent of the Tendring Circuit.

Prior to that Tom served as a minister in Cornwall, after a previous career in FE and HE management and training for ordained ministry at Wesley House in Cambridge. His training saw him spend time in the Fens Circuit, as well as in South Africa and with the Royal Navy Chaplaincy Service.

"East Anglia is an area I know from having trained at Cambridge, and which we have holidayed across in recent years; its mix of ancient cities, market towns and vast rural areas are comfortable environments from my growing up in Shropshire and Somerset; and it keeps us close to our daughter and young grandson who live in Ipswich."

Moving to Norwich last summer and working with its various churches was also appealing.

"While Methodist ministers don't simply pick an appointment, but are matched through a prayerful process, I was clear that Norwich appealed. Getting to undertake ministry in a Circuit committed to supporting mission and outreach, that has spent time thinking and praying about how discipleship and evangelism can be resourced, that operates cross-culturally [one of Tom's churches is Bowthorpe Road Methodist Church, a principally Chinese-language church], and offers a range of styles in terms of worship, theology and community engagement, really stood out to me. Alongside this was the opportunity to work with a substantial and experienced team of colleagues, lay and ordained, and to continue engaging ecumenically."

As well as his professional and Circuit ministry experience, Tom also brings to Norwich a wealth of wider connections. Having previously in a number of other roles alongside his day-to-day ministry, currently he serves as Chair of the Connexional Nominations Committee and the Methodist Representative to the URC's General Assembly – a role that in part grew out of his experience as a District Ecumenical Officer and working as a minister in a Methodist-URC church.

"I'm very much looking forward to living out both my ecumenical and my Connexional call here in Norwich," Tom says. "As a Methodist I firmly believe in a ministry of all people which is interconnected with others – whether that's the congregations we worship with, the communities we live amongst, the other churches we share in mission with, or the wider denominations we are part of that offer resourcing for our work on the ground."

"While ministering here in Norwich, I'm keen to ensure that we don't just look inward, but outward too – working with ecumenical colleagues and sharing the work we do here with others around the Methodist Connexion."



Brenda with her Jack Russell, Miri, and a portrait of herself as a WREN in the background. Picture courtesy of Charlotte Bromley-Davenport.

# Brenda celebrates 100th in musical style

Brenda Jarvis, considered something of a local celebrity in her Walsingham church, celebrated her centenary with a tea party in the village on February 10, despite accidentally crashing into a glass cabinet two days earlier. **Tony Rothe reports.**

Around 90 people attended the party throughout the afternoon, and enjoyed food and a superb cake created by an award-winning local cake maker. A sing-song included timeless favourites such as Blue Birds Over, Who's Your Lady friend, My Old Man, and Pack Up Your Troubles, all accompanied by the piano.

Brenda even did a speech, mostly saying that she was speechless and that people had been so kind.

A couple of days before her birthday, Brenda had slipped when gathering her long-awaited card from their Majesties the King and Queen, and crashed into a glass cabinet, which shattered and cut her as she regained her seat. She bravely bound up her own arms with bandages and most of those attending the party on the actual day were none the wiser!

Born in 1926, Brenda served as a Wren

in the war, helping guide planes to land over the radio from an RAF ground crew base near Manchester. 1926 was also, of course, the year the late Queen Elizabeth was born.

Brenda married Geoffrey soon after the war, and they were blessed with one son, Richard, who tragically died in his late 20s from a very rare cancer, believed to be related to his living for some time near a nuclear reactor in the North-West. His widow remarried but sadly also died from the same rare cancer some years later.

Geoffrey and Brenda enjoyed several years of Christian ministry together. He served his Anglican vocation in the Diocese of St Albans, including working as a priest near the Althorpe estate just before Lady Diana Spencer's engagement to Charles, Prince of Wales.

Geoffrey's final parish was Sandridge, and Rev and Mrs Jarvis retired to Walsingham, where he assisted as a non-stipendiary minister at the Anglican Parish Church of St Mary's until 1992, when they were both received into the Catholic Church.

Fr Geoffrey – as he became – died in 2009, and his funeral was held at the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, where he had assisted regularly since his Catholic priestly ordination.

Brenda continues to live in Walsingham, and was an active member of

Fakenham Choral Society into her 90s, walking to daily Mass until a few years ago. She has now conceded to receiving a lift, but is still at The Annunciation, Friday Market many days a week.

At the parish monthly anointing of the sick recently, mention was made from the priest, of the great speed with which 99 year-old Brenda was, "first out of the blocks" and leading the post-octogenarian contingent to receive the blessing at the front of the church!

Brenda is regarded as amongst the most sociable people in the village. One of the guests at her party was a former Shrine Franciscan – Fr Gerard Mary, from whom she usually receives a weekly video call – as he dials in from Rome, America or Oxford because of his responsibilities as a senior member of the Conventual Franciscan's.

Fr Gerard included a chapter about his dear friend Brenda in his notes about the time he spent in Walsingham during Covid, published as "Lockdown Reflections". He drew a moving parallel between Brenda's experience of losing her only son and her husband, and Our Lady, the widow of St Joseph, mourning her Crucified Son.

Justin Harmer, who hosted the party, said "It was a pretty wonderful afternoon. Brenda has of course had more birthdays than any of us, and she really is a bit of a star locally".



## Easter offers us a return to Paradise

Norfolk philosopher **James Knight** has been reflecting on the story of Adam and Eve, and explains that the events of Easter offer us the opportunity to regain access to the tree of life.

■ One of the most intriguing images in the Bible is the one in Genesis 3:24 where God drove out Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, and placed cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth outside to guard the way to the tree of life.

The cherubim with flaming swords guarding Eden conveys such an astonishing depth of theological and psychological truth. It shows that God and anything divine must be approached with the utmost awe and reverence. God is not closing the gate forever; He is keeping it sacred until humanity can once again approach it through holiness.

That's why the flaming sword's presence is so powerful – it is not to harm – it is to protect; to keep humanity from reaching the tree of life prematurely.

That is a profound truth that can be applied theologically when it comes to knowing God. We only get to know Him through the mediator, and the mediator is Christ Himself; the One who passes through death and rises again so that the way back is open for us.

But it also conveys a deep truth that can be applied psychologically, where one might be in exile from one's own spiritual purpose, and the cherubim at the gate symbolise self-imposed expulsion from our own potential. The spiritual and the psychological are inextricably connected here. If we don't approach God with the utmost awe and reverence, we will remain in exile from our own spiritual purpose and undergo a self-imposed expulsion from our own potential.

The expulsion is both a fall and a road back – it is the refiner's fire; the spiritual journey of transformation that turns the raw metal of the soul into gold, a passage through death into new life, where we get to confront everything that can truly awaken us into a relationship with Christ towards holiness and perfection.

The flaming sword does not merely guard the tree of life from us; it guards us from taking eternal life into a fallen self, because immortality without holiness would not be fit for Heaven, and Easter proclaims that holiness is now offered, not seized.



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# Christian holiday centres offer a warm welcome

Christian conference, activity, holiday and retreat centres across Norfolk and North Suffolk are warmly welcoming guests who are looking for something a little different.

## All Hallows Guesthouse

All Hallows Guesthouse is a unique urban retreat in the heart of Norwich offering peace and tranquility in the midst of a vibrant and historic city.

Tucked away just outside the centre of town, next to St Julian's Church and forming part of the Julian Shrine in Norwich, it offers guests rest and refreshment where Julian of Norwich lived and wrote her Revelations of Divine Love, over 650 years ago.

Equipped with seven comfortable bedrooms, spotlessly clean shared shower and toilet facilities, and a state-of-the-art self-catering kitchen, this refurbished former convent is ideal for quiet retreats with all the perks and amenities that come with easy access to a thriving city.

Catering for individual guests as well as group bookings, visitors can find rest in the house chapel, study library, or curl up in the cosy sitting room (with log fire in the winter months).

There is a delightful garden with plen-

retreats, family stays, tailored activity days and residential adventurous breaks; a warm welcome is guaranteed.

"If you're planning a break for your family, church, charity or youth project in 2026, we would love you to consider a visit to us here at the Horstead Centre," said Centre Manager Will Mills. You can simply hire the venue and cater for yourself, making the most of our space for your own programme of activities or we can take the stress out of it and provide everything for you in a full board visit with outdoor activities, the choice is



yours."

"The Horstead Centre takes full advantage of its wonderful setting. The house and gardens nestle amongst woodland which stretches down to the River Bure. If you choose to have activities, you can spend some quality time together on the water, with laugh-out-loud enjoyment as you delight in building rafts, canoeing,

or paddle-boarding. There are on-land activities available too, including archery and caving, geocaching, rock climbing and the zipline.

"We believe that adventure with friends and family should be accessible and so the centre has kept prices as low as possible for families and groups. A stay here may be more affordable than you think. Please contact us to book or to explore options," said Will.

[www.horsteadcentre.org.uk](http://www.horsteadcentre.org.uk)



tiful wildlife, as well as private access to St Julian's churchyard next door.

Ideal for self-guided retreats, All Hallows is a haven of restful hospitality, managed with a passionately eco-friendly ethos.

Next door, St Julian's offers up to four daily services including morning and evening prayer and a daily Mass.

[www.allhallowsnorwich.co.uk](http://www.allhallowsnorwich.co.uk)

## Horstead Centre

The Horstead Centre, near Coltishall, is a well-established residential outdoor activity centre and group venue, with a strong affiliation to the Diocese of Norwich. The centre offers affordable



## The Pleasaunce

The Pleasaunce Christian Endeavour Holiday Centre, on the North Norfolk coast at Overstrand, just two miles from Cromer, provides quality accommodation and programmes including a range of activities, evening entertainment and times of prayer and worship.

Standing in six acres of grounds, The Pleasaunce can accommodate up to 80 visitors, making it perfect for large parties. The centre is in an ideal location for all holidaymakers, conferences, groups, school parties and retreats. Scenic surroundings and a warm welcome await holidaymakers at the unique, Grade Two\* listed mansion

moderation for up to 16 guests in 9 bedrooms with two spacious living rooms, dining room (serving delicious home-cooked meals) and a Chapel. The accommodation includes two ground floor bedrooms (with shared wet room) providing easy access.

Our valued and well-used Creative Space, the 'log cabin' in the woods, is equipped with resources for guests to use. It is ideal for individuals or small groups to explore various forms of creativity such as writing, composing, painting, worship and more.

"The mature gardens are a guest favourite, consisting of varied landscapes, including a woodland walk, walled garden and natural meadow overlooking the river and open fields beyond. There is also a summerhouse from where our resident kingfisher is occasionally spotted. You will discover ample space to find peace and simply be.

"Our guests cherish the fellowship of chatting over meal times and the kitchen enjoys a five star food hygiene rating. From full-board to day visitor our guests are well fed with generous continental breakfasts, delicious home-cooked lunches and picnic suppers.

"The house is run by a team who live on site and are available to support guests through prayer, worship or simply by listening. We have daily times of reflection and worship to which guests are warmly welcome. As well as offering peace and quiet for the individual we are also ideal for day groups of up to 20 people; perfect for those in church leadership seeking His direction," said Paul.

[www.quietwaters.org.uk](http://www.quietwaters.org.uk)

designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens for Lord and Lady Battersea between 1888 and 1902.

Visitors have included Queen Alexandra, her sister the Dowager Empress of Russia, Princess Louise and several British Prime Ministers.

Offering fun and recreation for people of all ages, the Pleasaunce is a mere 100 metres from the cliffs, which overlook a popular sandy beach. Holidaymakers can choose to relax in the sea air, play a range of sports or take a walk along the coastal path.

Facilities on site include a children's adventure playground, tennis court, croquet and a putting green, table tennis, pool and bowls. There is also free wi-fi.

To find out more, ring: 01263 579212 or email [thepleasaunce@cehc.org.uk](mailto:thepleasaunce@cehc.org.uk) or [www.cehc.org.uk](http://www.cehc.org.uk)



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A decade after moving to Norfolk as a minister, **Sam Abramian** developed a heart for rural mission and is now set to take on a new challenge in a role supporting those who serve in rural communities across the county. **Peter Bending** reports.



Pictured from the left, are Jon Timms & Jo Allen, joint CEOs of Rural Ministries, with Sam Abramian.

# Rural mission focus for Sam

**S**am Abramian has recently been appointed as the Director for the East of England at Rural Ministries (RM), a growing network of rural churches, pioneers and practitioners that exists to support those called to live and serve in rural communities across the UK.

Sam and his family live in rural West Norfolk and have been part of the RM network for some time. For Sam, the appointment feels like a natural fit. He first moved to Norfolk in 2013 to become the minister at Union Church Hunstanton, having previously served as an associate minister at a church in Surrey.

"Moving to coastal Norfolk was an eye-opener, and we soon realised we loved being in a rural area," Sam said. "The contrast was striking. In the urban context there was less connection, more busyness, more resources and more choice, while in the rural context there was more space, more time for people and a naturally better pace of life. Being part of a smaller community means you can get to know an entire place and genuinely live community life, which is amazing."

In 2020, Sam transitioned into pioneering and missional listening, a journey he describes as deeply formative. "It's been a time of growth, with a strong sense of God deconstructing us on a personal level and then rebuilding us in terms of who we could be and how we live that out," he said.

In 2024, he became a part-time chaplain at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in King's Lynn. He continues this work alongside his new RM role. "I really value both roles and feel fortunate to be part of two fantastic teams," said Sam.

Sam's connection with Rural Ministries has been growing over the years: "I first connected with RM through Simon Mattholie (former RM CEO) years ago at a leadership conference. We met people there who were working in rural contexts and speaking the same language, with challenges very similar to our own. RM just made sense. Later, as we moved further into

missional listening, RM felt like home, and we really settled into their network."

This role is about supporting, connecting, and encouraging rural mission leaders across the East of the UK. Already well established in West Norfolk, Sam is taking time to make connections across the county: "Right now, I'm focusing on understanding what God is doing in rural areas in the region and developing opportunities for leaders to share ideas, stories, and encouragement."

"As I step into this new role, I bring a heart for helping established churches explore pioneering ways of sharing the gospel and discipling others, alongside a desire to encourage those who don't quite fit traditional ministry roles to find space where they can flourish as the people God created them to be," said Sam.

"Rural Ministries works with churches, practitioners, and pioneers in rural contexts, so I'd be really glad to connect with anyone serving or exploring mission in a rural setting. If the idea of rethinking mission and reimagining church resonates with you, I'd love to start a conversation."

If you would like to get in touch with Sam, you can contact him at [sam@ruralministries.org.uk](mailto:sam@ruralministries.org.uk) or visit [www.ruralministries.org.uk](http://www.ruralministries.org.uk)

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