

CENTRAL READERS' COUNCIL

Transforming ministry



THIS ISSUE
Walking
with the
wounded



Spring 2020
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Vol 120 No1



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Welcome to Transforming ministry

The beginning of a new decade is an appropriate time for a relaunch and I am delighted to be welcoming you to the first issue of our new look magazine, renamed *Transforming Ministry*, and what a great issue this is.

The thinking behind the new name grows directly out of the discussions about where Reader ministry is going, and whether it should be viewed as a ministry for Sundays only or rather for the whole of our Sunday to Saturday lives. Good ministry can be transformative – and we too are transformed by the opportunities God gives us to minister to others.

This issue, taking as it does the theme of ‘Walking with the wounded’, focuses on pastoral ministry. As the articles all make clear however pastoral ministry is not confined to Sunday mornings or coffee time after the church service. It spills out into our messy world and disordered lives – and where better? It is outside the church walls that we make a real difference to lives.

As Christians we are called, are we not, to carry each other’s burdens. Helen Bent’s article recognises churches’ responsibility to remember those who are weeping while the rest of us are dancing, and to find appropriate ways of supporting them within the liturgy and services available to us. Readers Tina Cumberlege, Pete Sandford and Alan Stanley all offer examples of good, imaginative practice as they minister to those who are hurting during the whole of the week. Kate Austin’s piece speaks of truly transformative work with some of the most vulnerable and despised women in our society. This is work



not many of us will be called to or equipped to do, but we can support similar initiatives and encourage others in our churches to do the same so the article includes practical suggestions for exactly this.

In the rest of the magazine, Reader Emeritus Ben Harvey looks back on a life of service,

demonstrating how ministry changes with circumstance and opportunity. Giles Morrison and Richard Appleton find themselves on opposite sides of a debate about humour in the New Testament, and Peter Stiling and Clare Masters approach the challenge of preaching during the Easter season in very different ways. I hope this range of ideas will inspire you in your own preaching and other ministries.

The next issue of *Transforming Ministry* will focus on Prayer. Contributors to the theme will explore different ways of praying, and prayer in different contexts. A number of exciting articles are already promised but if you would like to join the conversation, please do get in touch with me before the end of January. Later in the year we will look at ‘Working with others’ (copy date mid-April), and preaching on apocalyptic texts (copy needed early August). Of course there is plenty of room for articles on other topics too. Email me at editor@cofereadermag.co.uk with your ideas and suggestions.

With best wishes

Richenda



This is the first of our new Transforming Ministry covers as we relaunch our magazine. Thanks to Wild Associates for the design.



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Message from Bishop Martyn

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

Pastoral work doesn't just happen in church, it can happen anytime and anyplace. This edition of the newly titled *Transforming Ministry* magazine focuses on pastoral ministry and my own experience is that this can take place in the most unlikely of places.

When I became Bishop of Leicester, I started a programme of parish visits in which I asked the local clergy to ensure that I spent as much time with people who didn't come to their churches as with those who did. These have now evolved in to ‘Bishop's Big Conversation’ weekends and I do everything from visits to schools and colleges (ensuring there is time for conversations with individuals and small groups as well as the usual assemblies and classroom visits), men's breakfasts, afternoon teas in the care home, guest services, and – always the highlight – an evening being ‘grilled’ in the pub.

My last visit to the pub involved lots of banter and jokes. The place was packed – maybe because the vicar had offered a free pint to anyone who texted in a question for me. (In the end the landlord provided all the ‘free’ pints, as he said he was grateful for someone coming to answer all the questions he usually gets asked!) But I spent the whole evening having one conversation after another with individuals and small groups wanting to explore questions of faith. Some were from Christian backgrounds but had bad experiences of church. Some had ‘spiritual experiences’ that they struggled to articulate but wanted to know what I made of them. Some had intellectual questions (although I always wonder what personal experience is behind the question). Some wanted to share experiences of grief or pain or longing or desire. I'm fairly sure that very few of these people would have thought of visiting a church to ask these questions, but because I was there, on their territory, they opened up to me.

By the end of the evening I was exhausted (and probably a little worse for wear – it's thirsty work listening for four hours!) And yet I was strangely energised. This is genuine pastoral ministry – in the most unlikely of places.

You may have the same experience with work colleagues or people you meet at the bus stop or in the hairdressers. The context really doesn't matter (although I know some people have to be careful in their work environment). The real question is whether our eyes and ears are open to see and hear what God is doing in someone's life. Can we ‘see’ this person in the way Jesus ‘saw’ the woman who anointed his feet (Luke 7). Simon his host didn't see, hence Jesus' question, ‘do you see this woman?’ And can we hear the silent cry of the person in front of us, as Jesus heard the cry of the paralysed man lowered through the roof (Mark 2) – there was plenty which could have distracted him. And are we ready to have ‘everyday faith conversations’, speaking a language that people will understand (not ‘church speak’), simply sharing our own faith, with all its questions and uncertainties?

This is all part of what we mean by lay ministers ‘enabling mission on the frontline’. Not only are lay ministers ideally placed for these conversations, but they are also ideally equipped to enable all God's people to have these ‘everyday faith conversations’.

Martyn

Martyn
Bishop of Leicester



Sensitive ministry: the challenge of hurt and grief

We all walk with the wounded every day, says Helen Bent. None of us moves through life unscarred by some pain or loss, but many of us are good at hiding it away deep within ourselves. So how do we minister to those who are grieving, especially when all around them are celebrating?

My own ‘walk’ began when my middle child, Anna, became seriously ill. Within hours we were told she had a brain tumour. The following Sunday was Mothering Sunday. Anna underwent major brain surgery and gruelling radiotherapy and chemotherapy. After a short period of remission, she died three years later. The Sunday before Anna died was also Mothering Sunday. Despite being a mother of three, I had always had mixed feelings about Mothering Sunday, and my recent experience has served to reinforce that. Indeed, I was shocked at just how many people, men and children as well as women, found this day difficult, due to singleness, childlessness, loss of a mum, loss of a child, or a breakdown in relationship. I was left with the question: How do we lead such services sensitively when we know there will be many there for whom the day is difficult? This same dilemma applies to any period of ‘celebration’ in the calendar, when the mood of the season dictates that we should be joyful rather than sorrowful.

The following suggestions are offered as a starting point to enable us to walk sensitively with the wounded in daily life and to minister compassionately within regular worship.

Listen well

So often when we know someone is struggling or has been bereaved, we avoid conversation with them because we don’t know what to say. This only adds to the person’s sense of isolation. An invitation for a good quality coffee and cake can be comforting and practical. Often a simple acknowledgement – ‘I don’t know what to say...’ ‘No words seem very appropriate...’ ‘We can just sit together; we don’t have to talk if you don’t want to...’ will usually be sufficient to open up a conversation. Then all we need to do is listen well with care and sensitivity, aware that it may be difficult for the distressed to put deep pain into words.

Give time and space, perhaps gently prompt but don’t interrupt. Don’t be afraid of tears. They bring a blessed release. Sometimes we need to simply hand out tissues. And during worship, be aware that it is often in hymns that tears flow, when standing alongside can be reassuring and strengthening without any need for words. It is tempting to want to make everything better, but in times of loss, especially the tragic, that is not possible. However, we can make things more bearable by being prayerfully alongside.

Create safe space

We can helpfully create safe space where it is okay to be wounded, both outside in the community as well as inside the church. In instances of community grief, such as the Grenfell Tower fire or the Manchester Arena bombing, this happens naturally as flowers, candles and photos appear at a suitable place nearby. Disorientation and shock may be accompanied by powerlessness and vulnerability. A simple candlelit vigil may be helpful to draw people together with corporate prayer initiated at discreet intervals, using simple repeated, comforting phrases that are easy to remember:

*Cast your burden on the Lord
and he will sustain you.
In quietness and trust
shall be your strength.*

The singing of a simple chant such as Taizé, ‘The Lord is my light’ or ‘Within the darkest night’ could work well. Singing can gently evolve, ebb and flow, as others join in. Short prayers may be offered for those affected and their families, for the emergency services, and for medical expertise and support. Private grief can be expressed but in solidarity and companionship with others.

As part of the regular annual round, it may be appropriate to offer a Quiet or Blue Christmas Service. Such a service

is not synonymous with a ‘miserable’ Christmas, but it does need to match well with real needs and embrace a genuine sensitivity to those who are already vulnerable. Care should be taken to create both physical and emotional safe space. Ask advice from the bereaved themselves. Every person will respond to grief differently, even members of the same family experiencing the same loss. We must ask basic questions: What is helpful? And for whom?

Services should be short and not too wordy, including some prayerful act of remembrance. The lighting of individual candles is popular but it is not the only symbolism that can be used. Paper tears placed in a large bowl of water can be effective, or a board with post-it notes may enable people to share precious memories and stories to encourage others.

An annual Christmas tree festival could include a ‘blue’ Christmas tree. The tree is decorated with white lights and a few card baubles carry words that people can identify with: from psalms of lament, poems and wise words from bereaved people. Visitors are invited to tie a blue ribbon on the tree to offer their griefs to God. Alternatively, such a tree could be present in a church porch over Christmas or in a quiet corner for the Carol Services.

On Mothering Sunday, the congregation may be invited to pause and lay a heart shaped card around a strategically placed cross, identifying with Mary and John at the cross (John 19: 25–27) This could be offered as a prayer station to be used by individuals if they wish, or it could be used corporately as part of the intercessions, acknowledging and honouring the pain and needs of the day.

Provide appropriate words

I can usually be described as a proverbial chatterbox, but when Anna was acutely ill I found myself at a loss for words. The pain and grief were so deep, I had no vocabulary to voice the

anguish. This is when words of liturgy, psalms and hymns can come to our aid. As service leaders, we can make sensitive choices to enfold and hold the wounded and bereaved.

Use liturgy

During the final night of my father’s life, I sat by his bedside unable to pray. It was then that the familiar words of the Kyries came to me:

*Lord, have mercy;
Christ, have mercy;
Lord, have mercy.*

These were followed later by the words of the Nunc Dimittis in the traditional BCP format in which I had originally learnt them:

*Lord, now lettest thou thy servant
depart in peace:
according to thy word.
For mine eyes have seen
thy salvation...*

This is a pertinent reminder to us to help our congregation commit significant words of liturgy to memory in order to have resources to sustain them in times of difficulty. Today, ‘The Comfortable Words’ are used little outside BCP services, but the invitation of Jesus is timeless:

*Come to me, all who labour and are
heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
(Matthew 11: 28)*

Use Psalms

The Autumn edition of *The Reader* reminded us that the psalms give us language for every emotion, including deep pain and anguish. Psalms of lament can be gut-wrenchingly direct and raw, giving voice to confusion and anger. Here we are allowed to rail against God in times of distress.

*Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord;
(Psalm 130)
How long, O Lord, will you forget me?
(Psalm 13)
My God, my God, why have you
forsaken me? (Psalm 22)*

The church that no longer uses psalms regularly, or which only favours triumphant psalms of praise and thanksgiving, may be denying many of the congregation an adequate means to process their more negative emotions. I encourage all service leaders to get psalms back into regular use in services whether read, spoken corporately or sung. Contemporary paraphrases can be particularly gritty and ‘in your face’. Old Testament scholar, Adam Carlill,

has made a new metrical translation of all the psalms directly from the Hebrew set intelligently to familiar hymn tunes; hymnwriter, Martin Leckebusch has also written contemporary paraphrases to all 150 psalms. We can find worship songs based on psalms, which effectively juxtapose praise with a good dose of lament: ‘My soul finds rest’ (Psalm 62) by Aaron Keyes and Stuart Townend and ‘Bless the Lord, O my soul’ (‘Ten thousand reasons’, Psalm 103) by Matt Redman.

Use hymns and songs

Lament is one of the oldest forms of writing expressed through music, poetry or song. Examples are present across human cultures in both secular and sacred contexts, from spirituals and blues to contemporary pop. Over thousands of years people have needed to lament – alone and together. Here we can gain encouragement from the suffering song writers, who wrote out of painful experience and with whom we can identify.

Matt and Beth Redman, struggling with their own pain of miscarriages, have reworked Horatio Spafford’s 1873 hymn, ‘It is well with my soul’. Spafford too was well acquainted with grief and loss, losing four daughters in a steamship collision in the Atlantic.

John Bell has done much to remind us of the need for lament in worship, writing songs that helps us explore grief without rushing us on too quickly. And don’t forget, silence is an important way to plumb the depths of search for God.

Be intentional

In the bewilderment of terminal illness and bereavement, many still look to the church for solace. Recognition and acknowledgement of their pain is vital as well as ongoing, long term support. We can no longer hear the names of Borough Market, or Grenfell Tower, or Manchester Arena, without remembering recent events there with sad and heavy hearts. As time passes, such events cease to make the news and yet, the pain and anguish remain. Time does not necessarily heal.

What has happened to the families affected? And what of the many people who face other unexpected griefs: redundancy, breakdown of relationships, or sudden tragic death? If we continue to remember such people regularly in our prayers of intercession, others too will know that they are unlikely to be forgotten.

Final words

The journey of the wounded is not a simple linear pathway. Pain and sorrow come in waves affecting us more at certain times than others. Our wounds can turn us away from God in anger and disappointment or they can draw us closer to the Saviour, who himself bears the wounds of crucifixion. As Christian ministers, we have the privilege of walking with the wounded on a daily basis and enfolding them in the love and compassion of God during worship. Together, we can discover a new and deeper place of wholeness, assured of the sure and certain hope that is ours in Christ.



The Reverend Helen Bent is Head of Ministerial Training for the Royal School of Church Music and Praxis. She has written more extensively

on this subject in Celebration in Times of Grief and Sorrow, (Grove Worship Series W234, 2018) She is author of several other books, including Inspiring Music in Worship (RSCM, 2018) and Worship 4 Today (CHP, 2013/14)

To find out more

Resources abound on the internet, but here are some books to get you started:

- Ambrose, G. *et al.* (2006) *Together for a Season: All-age Resources for Advent, Christmas and Epiphany*, Church House Publishing. See p.88 for a ‘Blue’ Christmas service outline.
- Bell, J. and Maule, G. (1997) *When Grief is Raw*, Wild Goose Publications.
- Bent, H. (2018) *Celebration in Times of Grief and Sorrow*, Grove W234.
- Carlill, A. (2017–18) *Psalms for the Common Era*, available from Amazon.
- Coley, E. (2005) *Mothering Sunday*, Grove W185.
- Leckebusch, M. (2006) *The Psalms, 150 Metrical Psalms for Singing to Well-known Hymn Tunes*, Kevin Mayhew Ltd.
- Redman, M. and Redman, B. (2005) *Blessed be Your Name*, Hodder & Stoughton.
- Slee, N. and Miles, R. (2006) *Doing December Differently: An Alternative Christmas Handbook*, Wild Goose Publications.

The power of listening

You know when you get that feeling inside that what you are pursuing is from God?

Tina Cumberlege had exactly that experience – and it took her to her local surgery.

In March 2016, three friends (two doctors and a priest) suggested independently that I look at becoming a chaplain in a doctor's surgery as they thought this was right up my street! I ticked all three professional requirements so, I thought, 'is this what God might be calling me to do?'

I started pushing on a few doors to see whether they would open. I went to Birmingham to a GPs' practice where this work has been pioneered and is now integrated into its life. I then approached my own GP who was enthusiastic although we both recognised that as a pioneer ministry there would be many hoops to pass through before such a service could be offered to patients.

All the doctors in the practice were very encouraging, recognising that the time available to listen to patients was dwindling with the demands made on them, and that perhaps this could be a way of offering something more to those who might need a listening ear, rather than pills. I shared this vision with local Christian leaders who encouraged me to pursue the plans and the diocesan Bishop gave me his blessing.

The guidelines for an NHS chaplaincy have to be strictly adhered to; its handbook of 2015 was studied carefully by the surgery manager and after the

compulsory training in patient safety and wellbeing in June 2016, I proceeded to offer three hours chaplaincy service each Tuesday afternoon.

A notice about the new service was placed in both surgeries in the group, a copy of which is reproduced in the box.

My name is Tina Cumberlege. I am a local Licensed Lay Minister and have worked within the NHS for 30 years. My role as Chaplain at this Surgery is one of listening and guidance where I can offer a one to one, confidential, non-judgemental service which is open to all.

I will listen to your story, hear your concerns, offer reflection and, together, seek to find a way forward. Prayer will be offered if you wish.

Please ask your doctor or a member of the Reception Team if you would like to find out more about the Chaplain Listening Service, or if you would like to book an appointment to see me and you think you would find this facility helpful.

This was an evolving experience for us all! The room was unsuitable even though I had made curtains to cover

over the various boxes of clinical things. And the time was not ideal. As the winter months drew on, and my last patient had to leave in the dark, it was difficult to send folk home sometimes in an emotional state.

I now work three hours on a Wednesday morning in a larger more comfortable environment. The work has been funded by a generous patient giving £1000 a year.

On arrival at the surgery I pick up my green plastic box just 2 ft by 1 ft 6 in. containing all my kit. I have refreshment making facilities, my file containing patients' notes (which has to be locked away at the end of the morning), a cloth, a lighter, a wooden cross, some candles, pamphlets from the local hospice and suitable bookmarks to give away.

In a typical morning, I might see three people for 50 minutes each. I decided that I would not have access to the doctor's notes, which means that I don't have any idea of the specific reason they have come. I only ask to be told if a patient I am to see has been very recently bereaved because I know the damage that can be done by an unintentional insensitivity at this very difficult time.

I do make simple notes after each visit, really as an aide memoire. My note taking has evolved! In the first few months my notes were more like a short novel but subsequently have become just a few lines. They always include any suggestions that I might make as we reflect together. I always ask permission to make these notes and say that they will be scanned into their medical records. I have wonderful help from my surgery colleagues who have been so willing to develop this service with me.

Each patient is offered refreshments on arrival and then encouraged to tell their story. My role is predominantly to listen. I have an evaluation form which has helped me to develop the ministry. Questions on this form include: what people expected from the service, whether they felt listened to, whether the service met their needs, if they would use the service again and whether they would recommend it to friends and family. I always ask for comments on

how the service could be improved.

These are a few of the early comments made by patients using the service.

'I hope this service continues as I am sure it could help many people come to terms with their own fears and problems.'

'Just needed someone to listen, but received much more.'

'I was very satisfied. I felt free to talk and to express my feelings. Very kind, friendly approach.'

One member of staff said:

'It gives our patients (and you have kindly extended this service to staff also) the opportunity to talk through their situation with someone who is not directly involved. I do hope this service will be able to continue long term.'

I have made mistakes along the way: steering away from dependency was one of them. This made me realise how vital it was to have regular clinical and spiritual supervision.

I did have to take six months off in 2017 when I had a course of chemotherapy for lymphoma. One of the practice nurses said at the time she thought I was taking empathy a bit too far! But it has given me insight into the impact that such a diagnosis can have. Generally, from my point of view, it has been an absolute privilege to offer this service over the three years I have worked as a surgery chaplain. I have seen over a hundred people, many up to four times although I don't make any deadline. It just seems that there are natural breaks when the service is no longer needed. Patient needs include bereavement, a terminal diagnosis, or they do not want to worry family about their anxiety. Many just want to pour out concerns which have become overwhelming. The demography of the area means that most of the people I see are retired, although I have had sessions in an evening so that people in work can also use the service.

The service has to be patient-led as it is part of the NHS provision. This is one area which I struggled with at first. In parish life, as a lay minister, I would always be sure to follow up with a phone call after a pastoral visit but this is not how a surgery works.

I have experienced many Holy Moments as I like to call them. I will share a couple of them* to give an idea of the reasons for the patients' visits and why I love what I do.

Linda*

A young woman in her thirties came in, very angry with the world and everything in it. A parent had died and she had not been able to say goodbye. It was the first time she had experienced the death of a loved one. I listened, and after about 45 minutes I suggested that she put pictures of her beloved parent around her home as a constant reminder of the good times they had shared together. At the next visit, three weeks later, I noticed the anger had subsided but the fact that she had not been able to say goodbye really worried her. I had written a short service which I suggested she might like to look at and decide whether this would be a help. On the third visit we said this service together, lit some candles and a tremendous peace descended over us both. There were copious tears but after fifteen minutes she just got up gave me a hug and left with a wonderful smile and I haven't seen her since.

George*

A lovely working man in his sixties came and talked about his life which, at that time, was a great struggle. He was 'a man's man' but this safe space gave him permission to have a good cry. I suggested that, as he loved his garden, he might write down something beautiful there that he noticed each day, and reflect on it at the end of the week. After he left, I feared that my suggestion had been inappropriate – but God decided otherwise! At the end of each week George and his wife would reflect together and there was real transformation in his life. After another time together, just exploring more light in this dark tunnel, he wrote to say thank you for putting his life back on track. He comes back from time to time, to let me know how things are going. What a privilege this is!

Experiencing the loss of a loved one can bring about reactions that are completely out of character and so often difficult to cope with. Perhaps my role in the surgery is to help people make sense of their grief in a safe environment.

One patient said, 'I would have had to make several appointments with my GP to talk through my emotional state which would have wasted valuable GP appointments. I needed someone to listen to me, take time to help me and to see that what I felt was normal and that I will survive and come through it.'

I respect the faiths or non-faith of those I see. I am not there to share my Christian faith but 95 per cent of those I see ask for prayer and this does add a beautiful dimension to their visit.

Because of the pioneering nature of this ministry it can be rather lonely as I don't have any surgery chaplain colleagues in the area. On the other hand, the surgery team are so supportive and I love working with them.

I have a real passion that, as Christians, we must look for ways in which we can bring the love of Christ into our communities. In a world where so many people feel unloved and of no value, it has been wonderful to share appropriately his love with all those who visit me on a Wednesday morning.

**Names and other significant details have been changed to protect patient confidentiality.*

To find out more

See the Association of Chaplaincy in General Practice:

www.gpcchaplaincy.com

A copy of *NHS England – NHS Chaplaincy Guidelines 2015: Promoting Excellence in Pastoral, Spiritual and Religious Care* can be downloaded from:
www.england.nhs.uk/chaplaincy



Tina Cumberlege is a Licensed Lay Minister in Winchester Diocese.



Preparing the chaplaincy area.

Ministering to the bereaved

Helping grieving relatives say goodbye to their loved one in a way that is truly meaningful for them is both a challenge and a privilege. Alan Stanley feels strongly about the importance of getting it right.

Readers have long ministered at the interface between church and community. Today that pioneering and entrepreneurial vocation could continue to be our special gift to the church. Our Victorian forebears did great work for God:

‘They formed an immense reservoir of vocation and power . . . , parish workers in the workshop and cottage among their own people they can bear witness of the very highest value.’¹

Readers still provide ‘an immense reservoir of vocation and power’ and could continue to be at the forefront of bringing the Kingdom close to those yet to experience it. I want to concentrate on that area which the church is rapidly losing to other providers, the traditional ‘hatch, match and dispatch’ ministries, and in particular the ‘dispatch’ or funeral part.

The same arguments apply to weddings and the non-church substitute for baptism, baby naming ceremonies. The Church of England is losing funerals to civil celebrants at an alarming rate. One wise response the church has taken is the Funerals Project. A clearly Christian funeral, and if a Church of England one, containing the five mandatory liturgical elements, and offering sensitive pastoral follow up, must remain the gold standard of church funerals. This is a ministry familiar to, and valued by, many Readers. However, the majority of families today are not either able or willing to sign up to that level of certainty about the Christian faith. By expecting them to do so as a pre-requisite of having some sort of Church of England funeral ministry seems to be placing an unwarranted barrier around our ministry to the bereaved. Paul Avis says:

‘the parochial approach to ministry that casts its mission in the mould of pastoral care, is not troubled by fuzzy edges, and seeks integration of the committed Christian community with the wider community through service’.²

This connecting of the Christian community to the wider community through the ‘fuzzy edges’ of service is something which can only happen if the Christian community is strongly Christ-centred. In discussing the way in which faith is mediated in the life of a local Christian community, the parish church, Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank write ‘We are called upon to live the scriptures, and to imitate in a non-repetitive and unique way the example of Christ’.³

One unique and non-repetitive way I have encountered of living the scriptures is to care for bereaved people in a way which meets their individual funeral needs. Very sadly over the past few years I have been contacted time and again by Readers, or soon to be Readers, who are providing tailor made, appropriate, funeral care to non-church families and who have been told by their bishops that they must either stop doing this, or not be a licenced Reader. This denial of the vocation of many Christ-centred people needs to be challenged. We can do this by looking at what two traditionalist Anglicans, our friends Davison and Milbank, say. They contend that being drawn into the mystery of the action of Divine Love in the Eucharist is also to be commissioned and sent. This sentence of theirs sums up the sense of vocation that is felt by many Christians who are wanting to provide compassionate and appropriate funeral care:

Like children born and raised in a loving home, we can grow to be exploratory, generous and outgoing: we are holy when we can embrace our neighbours and all of reality, turning this embrace into an adventure and a cry which proclaims that the substance of everything is Christ and that our embrace is not ours, but Christ’s.⁴

The gospel parable which, for me, is central to living the scriptures and sharing Christ’s embrace of hurting, bereaved people is that of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25–37). This parable is crucial to an understanding of why Readers who feel a vocation to

funeral work beyond the authorised liturgy should not be prevented from exercising that vocation, that I need to spend a few moments looking at it.

The victim of the robbery is, in many ways, like a bereaved person. The etymology of ‘bereaved’ carries with it the sense of being robbed, having something taken away by violence, being deprived of something personal. Both the victim of the crime on the Jericho road and the bereaved person are hurting, are in pain, are disorientated and desperately need help. The priest in the parable represents the public face of the faith. He looks at the man in need and decides that, for religious reasons, he cannot help him. Perhaps he has in mind that if the man dies on him, he will be defiled. There is a feeling among some in the church that the care shown by Christians who take non-church funerals in some way ‘defiles’ them or the church, because there is not a spoken Christian message accompanying the care.

It is as if the priest in the parable, a type of the Church of England’s response to those needing the healing care of a funeral, says to the wounded man: ‘I will help you provided you agree to me saying certain prayers for you, reading something from the scriptures for you and giving you a sermon. If you do not agree to these things, I will pass by on the other side, otherwise I will be in some way compromising my own beliefs. I can give to you if you agree to all these things, if you can’t then I will leave you hurting until someone else comes along’. That someone else is more and more becoming the Funeral Celebrant.

The church, the argument runs, must base its own funerals on the death and resurrection of Jesus (but, strangely, not on his life examples of compassion). Any funeral taken by a representative of the church must make this understanding explicit. That was the reasoning behind the neglect shown by the priest and the Levite. They must above everything uphold the requirements of their faith. In the parable Jesus shows that they are not

doing what God requires, no matter what their reasoning.

Commenting on this part of the parable Garland says ‘The story presents the failure of religious leaders to be humane and follow the dictates of scripture, and it cast aspersions on the institution they served’.⁵

The church, seeing someone hurting, in pain, wounded, should simply ask, ‘How can I help?’ There are no conditions. It cost the Samaritan to help the wounded man. He very probably gets his blood on him, he has to walk while the victim rides, he loses time and cash.

This Samaritan gives what he has with him, bandages, oil, wine, his mount; but he also possesses a greater gift for the victim: mercy. The priest and the Levite may not have had with them the tools they used in performance of their temple duties, but they lacked that inner core of mercy. They forgot the motive behind their cultic worship:

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? He has shown all you people what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.⁶

Jesus asks the lawyer whose question prompted the parable, who he thought proved to be a neighbour to the man who fell victim to the robbers. The lawyer’s initial question was objective, technical, legal – ‘Who is my neighbour?’ Jesus’s answer is intimate, personal, subjective. Graham James writes ‘The good Samaritan illustrates how God’s generosity is overwhelming, and found in unexpected people’.⁷

The legal position of Readers exercising the evolving vocation of Funeral Celebrant is unclear. In ‘public prayer’ we must only use authorised forms of service. Let’s de-couple the word ‘funeral’ from any church connotations and let it stand alone. So, if I take a funeral for an atheist family, no religious elements at all, that, legally,



will be fine, because I am not engaged in ‘public prayer’. What if the family are agnostic and want the Lord’s Prayer saying, or a prayer of thanks for the life of the deceased? What if the family would like a prayer asking God to look after their loved one, but cannot sign up to the churchy language in the official Prayer of Commendation? It looks to me like any Reader giving that care could be sanctioned by their bishop. Those Christians who bind up the wounds of the bereaved by taking funerals that are personal to them give the Jesus answer to the lawyer’s question. These hurting people are individuals, they are not objects to be legislated about, but subjects to be cared for. This person is my neighbour. My neighbour to whom God’s generosity is overwhelming, and perhaps found not just in unexpected people, but in unexpected places.

Tom Wright points out that ‘the gospel itself is neither a system of thought, nor a set of techniques for making people Christians, it is the personal announcement of the person of Jesus’.⁸ Wright goes on to say, ‘gospel truth is not a matter of ideas only, but of symbol, story and praxis’.⁹ Readers who

take non-church funerals symbolise the Church’s concern for those in pain, become part of the story of the bereaved by practising what they preach: love for God and love for neighbour. It may not be a tidy arrangement, but then, as Lucy Winkett reflects:

At the margins, though, the possibility of change is closer to the surface where good news of new truth remains volatile and free.¹⁰

Perhaps Readers, living and working at the margins, are really well placed to help the whole Church look again at those places where the good news ‘remains volatile and free’. Perhaps this can be our gift to a church asking, ‘where next for Readers?’



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Enabling transformation – seeing hope emerge

Some of the most damaged and vulnerable in our society are also the most despised and isolated.

What can we do to counter this? Kate Austin and her colleagues tackle the problem head on.

Susan* is well known to our local police. She has worked as a prostitute for many years and has a reputation for violent, aggressive behaviour. The policewoman who arrested her most recently though was pleasantly surprised, and messaged me to say so. ‘Susan kept talking about Emerge. She said it was the first time anyone had really listened to her, I have never seen her so calm.’

What is Emerge?

Its full name is Emerge Hub Community Interest Company. We are currently located in Grimsby and are hoping to expand to other towns/cities in the future. There are three directors (of which I am one), and a group of carefully selected volunteers. We are not a Christian organisation, but we do have a Christian ethos – which means that a majority of the directors must be Christians. In fact, all three of the current directors are Christians so when the three of us meet up we are able to pray together. What we do can be tough, and praying together helps sustain us.

Our volunteers don’t have to be Christian – some are, some aren’t. Those who aren’t need to be respectful of the Christian ethos policy and those who are need to understand that proselytising is completely unacceptable.



A mural in the centre shows butterflies emerging from their previous life.

The women we work with are extremely vulnerable – to push our beliefs at them would be exploitative at the very least. What volunteers do need to offer though is commitment – they must be willing to stay with us for a minimum of two years – and they must be prepared to train to at least a Level 2 Certificate in Counselling Skills. There is a variety of other training available in order to keep them safe.

What is the difference between a Community Interest Company (CIC) and a Charity?

A CIC is a not-for-profit concern, but it does have to be self-supporting and financially sustainable. Individuals can be helped to set up and run businesses under its umbrella.

A Charity has to be established exclusively for what is known as public benefit. That means its only purpose must be charitable. It may be eligible for grants for staff salaries (it is more difficult to obtain these for a CIC), but it cannot underwrite or oversee businesses.

What does Emerge do?

Emerge Hub runs a Day Centre, a therapeutic space where women can come for advice, companionship, referral to refuges or help getting housing. We hold regular pamper days to promote self-worth and run courses to teach new skills including self-defence. But the most important thing we do is help these women to learn that they have value. We have found the most effective way to achieve this is by sustained, empathetic therapeutic work.

Some women come to us because they have heard about us from colleagues, but outreach is an essential part of what we do. Every week we have three nights when we go out onto the streets or into brothels, to talk to women, listen to them without judgement and let them know what is available for them at the

Day Centre. We are also researching ways to contact women through internet ‘adult sites’ because many of the women work from these.

All too often we are meeting women who have histories of sometimes horrific abuse. Their childhood and teenage years – whether in the care system or with dysfunctional parents – have been traumatic. Take Alison*, for example. Alison was sold to a brothel at the age of twelve – by her mother who worked there as a receptionist. Women whose early lives have been so deeply dysfunctional are likely to be bound by patterns of faulty attachment, and to believe themselves to be utterly worthless. The majority have a drug habit – which may have been used as a means of control, but can also be a chosen form of escape from a life of utter despair. Most of those who are mothers have had their children taken away from them – often that was the point at which they lost all hope.

Uncomfortable truths

Addiction, sex work, children being taken into care – these are all tough issues and ones from which we (and members of our churches) might naturally shy away. It would be more comfortable surely to look away and ignore the fact that such unpleasant things happen in our town. But if we identify as Christians, we know we are not called to be comfortable. All we have to do is read the gospel accounts of Jesus meeting outsiders – the lepers, the demon-possessed man, the foreign woman with a sick child, the woman with the continuous haemorrhage. Or what about those unpopular sinners – little Zaccheus the tax collector, the adulterous woman? In each and every one of these encounters the damaged individual is received unconditionally by Jesus and made whole. The women we work with today are the twenty-first century equivalent. They have been damaged, seemingly beyond repair, by the terrible things life has thrown at

them. They need to be welcomed with love, listened to without judgement, offered healing and given hope for the future.

Thankfully, most of us will never experience the trauma that has driven women like Alison and Susan to lives of addiction, violence and prostitution. What we can know though is that no one chooses to live like that. No little girl ever says ‘I want to be a prostitute when I grow up. I want to be a heroin addict’. Drugs may dull the pain for a while – but true healing only comes with rediscovery (or sometimes a first-time discovery) of self-worth and the gift of hope for a better future. The journey to new life will be long and slow. There are no short cuts if healing is to be lasting. God is the ultimate healer, and the template is unconditional love. Our loving presence in his place opens the doors of hearts that are damaged and have been closed for many years to begin to explore the possibility of healing. We are all fellow workers with Christ, whether we are on the street, praying behind the scenes or supporting financially.

What can you do to help?

Wherever your church is, there will be women working as prostitutes somewhere within a 30-mile radius of you. It is likely therefore that there will already be an organisation engaged in similar work to ours. See the ‘To find out more’ box at the bottom of this article. You will be most helpful if you support what is happening locally, but donations to national organisations are always welcome too.

Here are the kinds of support we appreciate at Emerge, many of which will be appreciated by those working in this field in other parts of the country too.



We provide a safe space for women with troubled lives.

● **Fundraising** – we always need more money, for running costs, for transport and legal support costs for the women, for training courses and counselling sessions. We have a wonderful lady who knits beautiful scarves for us to sell, and we do receive individual donations. If your church group adopts a cause to support for a Lent appeal for example, you could argue that enabling some of the most disadvantaged of our sisters to emerge from a living hell into life in all its fullness has a particular seasonal relevance.

● **Sponsorship** – does your church like to adopt a project? If so, this might be a fruitful approach. Maybe you could support a woman to do a training course – in a life-skill such as self-defence or bookkeeping, or perhaps an NVQ in plumbing or catering to help her gain employment.

● **Gifts in kind** – we appreciate packs of toiletries for women going into new accommodation, or starter packs of cleaning materials / household basics for those who have been found council accommodation. Do check exactly what is needed though, and try to ensure that gifts fit the local need.

● **Volunteering** – any organisation like ours relies on a steady stream of volunteers. But any organisation worth its salt will be discerning and prayerful in its recruitment so it is important to prepare any members of your congregation who wish to volunteer that practical work may not in fact be the right way for them to serve.

● **Prayer** – don’t underestimate its power! Safety and confidentiality



Cards and other items made by the women to help raise funds.

issues will probably mean it is not appropriate for members of your congregation to pray for individual women by name, but they can pray for the work of the organisation, for the people who run it, for the volunteers and for the women themselves.

Imagining a future

I visited Susan recently. She has been in and out of prison many times, but finally she can hope that this stay will be her last. For the first time in her life she is thinking about her future. ‘What are your dreams,’ I asked her, ‘what would you really like to do?’ She didn’t need to think for long. ‘I want to run a mobile smoothie store at the seaside’ she said. What would she need for that? A bicycle, a cart to carry fruit, a liquidiser that can be powered by bicycling. It is quite a modest ambition. It would be wonderful if one or two of our local church congregations would take on sponsorship of the mobile smoothie business start-up costs as a fundraising project so we can help Susan emerge from her chrysalis in time for the summer.

* All names have been changed.

To find out more

Emerge Hub CIC is based in Grimsby and serves the town and immediate surrounding areas. You can find out more at: <https://www.emergehub.uk>
Beyond the Streets is an umbrella organisation to which charities and CICs working with prostitutes anywhere in the UK can be affiliated. They can give information about local organisations. Contact them at: <https://beyondthestreets.org.uk>
To find out what is happening in your area, google your town name and ‘Sex Worker Outreach’.



Kate Austin is Director and Therapeutic Lead at Emerge Hub CIC in Grimsby. She is also a spiritual director and supervisor of spiritual directors for Lincoln Diocese.

Responding well – growing in confidence to reach out to people experiencing mental health issues

Pete Sandford combines his faith and lived experience of mental health recovery with his service as a Licensed Lay Minister / Reader and his work as an NHS Mental Health Recovery Worker.

You have responded well, do this and you will live' (Luke 10: 28)¹. So Jesus replied to the test set by the lawyer eager to justify himself. But how confident do we feel about our response when we meet people experiencing mental health issues?

Sunday to Saturday faith

Whether wearing my Mary-Blue Reader's scarf on a Sunday, or my NHS-Blue lanyard in my Recovery Worker role Monday to Friday, this question of responding well is equally central to my sense of identity and calling. By the grace of God, and seven days a week, I wear beneath both scarf and lanyard the blue of my lived experience of the recovery journey from twenty-five years of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), now in remission over the last five years and coinciding with my time as a Reader.

What stands out for me about Sunday to Saturday faith is the call to live each day with the same authenticity and integrity; the call to be as fully present before the 10.00AM congregation on a Sunday morning as I am with the people I am privileged to work with and alongside on Monday morning. This call for me is rooted within the Rule of Life of the Northumbria Community² by which I have endeavoured to live for the last twenty years, a rule patterned after the life of Christ.

The Northumbria Community Rule of Life

The Rule we embrace and keep will be that of *Availability and Vulnerability*:

- we are called to be *available* to God and to others;
- we are called to intentional, deliberate *vulnerability*.

Availability and vulnerability are already challenging disciplines in any area of life, and working alongside

people who live with severe and enduring mental health issues is particularly challenging. Yet it is here, in this thin place, that I find these disciplines to be most relevant as myself and my colleagues in the Community Enhancing Recovery Team (CERT)³ support are finely attuned to any scent of hypocrisy or disingenuity and will quickly disengage or challenge should they perceive that we are being less than honest or lack transparency in our interactions.

If availability and vulnerability are central to my spirituality, then the values of the NHS Trust in which I work⁴ – respect, compassion, partnership, accountability, fairness, and ambition – are central to my professional practice. Being part of the CERT team, I set great store by our shared disciplines of Case Formulation and Reflective Practice which bring us back to our core values and enable us to sustain an approach which is collaborative, compassionate, and consistent. Even within a secular role and a large and diverse multi-disciplinary team of people with different faiths and of none, these shared values and practices enable Sunday to Saturday faith to feel not only natural but also achievable.

A core ethical question of the Northumbria Community is 'How then shall we live?'⁵ I often hear its echo in the mouths of those I work with and alongside as we strive continuously towards a model of recovery which recognises the dignity and value of each person. Even when one step forward is followed by two or more back, we continue to hold onto a hope for the future with and on behalf of that person.

If, in the words of Archbishop Rowan Williams, mission is 'finding out what God is doing and joining in',⁶ then I see God already at work through the values and practices of my colleagues and the relationships we are privileged to share.

Underlying this missiology, my Christology is profoundly shaped by what Brother Roger of Taizé described as the mystery of a presence: 'A luminous Gospel insight reappeared during the Second Vatican Council: "Christ is united to every human being without exception ..." for a long time it had remained buried under the dust of the ages. Later Pope John Paul II would add: "... even if he or she is not aware of it."⁷

Having outlined my sense of responding to God's presence and calling when wearing my blue NHS lanyard, I turn now to how this connects to and interacts with my blue Reader scarf.

Equipping the saints

I have recently enjoyed reading the Central Reader's Council booklet, *Resourcing Sunday to Saturday Faith*⁸ in which its authors offer a number of WAGOLL text-boxes outlining 'What A Good One Looks Like'. The second chapter, 'Teaching the Faith', outlines five descriptors, listed in the box below.

A good teacher of the faith:

- loves God and has a thorough knowledge of God's story;
- loves people and knows how to listen;
- loves learning and knows how people learn;
- reflects regularly on their practice;
- does all this in a spirit of prayer, imagination and creativity.

Without presuming to suggest that I have already attained to perfection, but having a sense of working towards these goals,⁹ I offer the following reflection on how, in church and in co-facilitating the Diocesan Mental Health Awareness Day,¹⁰ I work to grow others' confidence to reach out to people experiencing mental health issues.



Sculpture 'Entraide' (Mutual assistance) by Camille Colruyt at the Abbaye D'Orval in Belgium. The plaque at the bottom of the sculpture reads: 'This group is inspired by the Gospel Parable of the Good Samaritan. The arms of compassion embrace and uphold the wounded traveller.' Many thanks to the Abbaye D'Orval and photographer André Carbonneaux for permission to use this image.

Loving God and knowing God's story

We love God because God first loved us (1 John 4: 19). Without God's prior movement towards us, there is no story. God is love (1 John 4: 16) but in times of depression, we may feel that God is a distant judge and that 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

(Psalm 22: 2; Mark 15: 34) is the only prayer that makes sense.

In my own recovery journey, I was helped many times by the insight that at the furthest point from God, God is there in Christ. Having found God to be present even in God's absence, I have a story to tell of how God came alongside me that enables me to come alongside others in order to share the consolation with which I myself have been consoled (c.f. 2 Corinthians 1:4).

We are in a world where light and darkness co-exist. As we aspire to the light, could a doubt take hold of us? Far from worrying about this, [Dostoyevsky] a Russian mystic wrote, 'I am a child of doubt and unbelief; My hosanna has passed through the crucible of doubt.' Happy are those who walk from doubt towards the brightness of a communion in Christ!¹¹

Reading the above words from Brother Roger, I began to realise that I was not alone in my times of doubt and depression and that, even if a long journey lay ahead of me, a path towards communion was open. If I have anything to teach, it's what I have first learned from this lived experience as, like St Paul, I find, through Christ, whenever I am weak, then am I strong (2 Corinthians 12: 10).

Loving people and knowing how to listen

Just like the lawyer interrogating Jesus on the inheritance criteria for eternal life, we may be effusive in our proclamation of love for God, but then restrictive in our practice of love for our neighbour. While it can be tempting to judge the lawyer for his search for a statute of limitation in respect of neighbourly duty, and the priest and the scribe for having passed by on the other side, we may ourselves be found wanting. But not everyone is easy to love, and reaching out to our neighbour in need may provoke fears within us, even when it is our wish to help. Trinidadian storyteller Grace Hallworth says, 'There are ears that have the power to open mouths'.¹² The

readiness to remain present, whatever the person may say, is a key enabler of that listening.

In a spirit of appreciative enquiry, I therefore designed a sequence of discussion prompts for the Awareness Day, reimagining the Parable of the Good Samaritan in the context of mental health and refining these with the support of our small task group.

If the man who fell amongst thieves were instead a person experiencing mental health difficulties today:

- Who might this person be and what might be their experience?
- Who might be the characters who do not reach out to provide assistance and what might prevent them from reaching out?
- Who might be the characters who do reach out to the person experiencing difficulties, and what might enable them to reach out?

The discussion arising from the above questions became the focus of my MA Biblical Studies dissertation¹³ and over a number of workshops, these have provided powerful new insights into a parable which continues to challenge us on how we love our neighbour.

Loving learning and knowing how people learn

Prior to redundancy in 2009 followed by six years as a full-time family carer, I had been building a career as a Learning and Development professional consulting on equality and diversity with local authorities, and on religious literacy for the Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum. Having the opportunity as a Reader to contribute to the Mental Health Awareness Day has offered a significant step forward not only in my personal recovery journey, but also professionally. Since making a return to the workplace, I have a renewed confidence to offer my training skills in work.

A great strength of the Mental Health Awareness Day is its co-production¹⁴ and its rootedness within the specific challenges of our context, particularly connected to the extremes of poverty

Notes and references

¹ Translations are my own throughout.

² Northumbria Community <https://bit.ly/2q8aSmn>

³ Community Enhanced Recovery Team (CERT) <https://bit.ly/2JCz0Y>

⁴ Sheffield Health & Social Care NHS Trust, <https://shsc.nhs.uk>

⁵ Northumbria Community <https://bit.ly/2C38orX>

⁶ Williams, R. (2003) Presidential Address to General Synod in York.

Available at <https://bit.ly/2Wxw6Gh>

⁷ Brother Roger (2003) *God is Love Alone*, Continuum, p.9.

⁸ Central Readers Council (2019) *Resourcing Sunday to Saturday Faith*, pp. 13–19.

⁹ See also Philippians 3: 12.

¹⁰ Diocese of Sheffield, *Mental Health within a Church Context Training*, available at: <https://bit.ly/2N8qRK5>

¹¹ Brother Roger, p.64.

¹² Hallworth, Grace, personal conversation.

¹³ Sandford, P.J. (2018) 'Responding Well'. Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Sheffield.

¹⁴ New Economics Foundation (2013) *Co-Production in Mental Health*, NEF. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2N5u06N>

¹⁵ O'West, G. (2015) *Doing Contextual Bible Study: A Resource Manual*. Ujamaa Centre. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2BZat8>

and inequality within our diocese. With this in mind, the Contextual Bible Study method – originating with the work of Gerald O. West in Apartheid-era South Africa¹⁵ and focusing on a dialogical reading of the Bible with and alongside the poor and marginalised – feels most appropriate to the task of learning alongside people who experience mental health issues and their supporters. As a group, we continuously welcome and act on feedback thereby allowing participants to hold us to account and shape our ongoing practice.

Making time for regular and prayerful reflective practice

Wearing my blue NHS lanyard Monday to Friday and my blue Reader scarf on Sundays means that co-facilitating the Awareness Day is not just an event that comes around every six months, but very much about life-long learning and every-day service. This means mental health features regularly both in my sermons, services, and contributions to PCC; and faith features regularly in my interactions at work. My journey has

been impacted significantly by the Benedictine motto, *laborare est orare* – to work is to pray. In both work and worship, my eyes are open to see how God is at work, even in the smallest things. In this, I take inspiration from David Lyall’s writing on worship and pastoral care.

We sit with the depressed, believing that there is no human darkness into which a glimmer of light cannot break through, that the last word is not of despair but of hope. We stand by the remorseful in the conviction that there is no human folly that cannot be forgiven, that the final word is not of judgment but of grace. We support the bereaved, believing that there is no human grief that cannot in some measure be consoled, that the last word is not of death but of life.¹⁶

To sustain this discipline, I have a rule of life which links together private daily prayer and study with collective reflection and sharing. A distinctive factor in this discipline is that more of my conversation partners are those I

work with and alongside than those with whom I worship.

Praying with imagination and creativity

The final descriptor argues for ‘habits of learning – approaches to Bible study, skills for community discernment and listening, and reflection on experience – habits which will survive the demands of everyday life.’ I hope through the above, to have offered an insight into how, with imagination and creativity, I live out my Sunday to Saturday faith whether in a Mary-blue Reader scarf or NHS blue lanyard. The blue of my lived experience I wear more lightly now and know that I do not walk alone.



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this article however are Pete’s own and not those of the Sheffield Health and Social Care NHS Trust.

Notes and references
¹⁶Lyall, D. (2005) ‘The Bible, worship and pastoral care’, in: Ballard, P. and Holmes, S. (eds), *The Bible in Pastoral Practice*, DLT, p.240.

Many thanks to photographer André Carbonneaux for permission to use his picture of ‘Entraide’, a sculpture by Camille Colruyt at the Abbaye D’Orval in Belgium. See www.orval.be/en/home/Abbey for more information about this work.

Serving a community

By its very nature, ministry involves interaction with others. Ben Harvey looks back over sixty years and sees how his vocation has changed – but the whole path has been defined by his relationships with people and with God.

Originally, I studied for the Priesthood at SSM Kelham, Newark in the 1950s. SSM – Society of the Sacred Mission – is an Anglican religious order, living to the Benedictine Rule which, with some modification, the students shared. Student life began in the junior section, followed by National Service in North Africa, after which I returned to Kelham for theological study. It was after three and a half years, with ordination looming, that I began to doubt my vocation. After much prayer and thought, I left.

Meanwhile, my parents had moved from Shepperton to Whitley Bay in North Tyneside. We went to church together my first weekend back and as we left the vicar said to me ‘Just the man I want!’ This was the last thing I wanted to hear – it was more than seventeen years before I went into a church again.

I got a job as a salesman selling engineers’ cutting tools, precision equipment and machine tools dealing directly with the men operating the machinery. It was important, since I had never been in their place or worked with their machinery, that I be honest with them. So I told them about my background. This bore fruit because, from time to time, I would be asked about my faith – and on one occasion to help with a marriage relationship.

My own marriage – to Rosemary – began in 1974. We began our life together in a flat in Newcastle, but when our son Richard was a year old the time had come for us to move somewhere larger. We offered the asking price for a stone built cottage in Holystone, north of Rothbury, Northumberland, which needed a lot of work. But we had had no reply from the vendor, and we knew another couple was interested as well. So we went back, for another look and to check out the competition. And there, by chance, we met Alice, the vendor. ‘I expect you want somewhere for weekends’, she said. ‘No’, we told her, ‘we are going to live here and send our son to the local school when he’s old

enough.’ ‘In that case’, Alice rejoined, ‘ring the Estate Agent tomorrow and the house is yours’. News travels fast: by the time we moved in the community knew all about us. They welcomed us warmly, and were helpful and supportive as we settled in and worked on the restoration of our house giving us plenty of useful tips and proving themselves real friends.

A couple of years later, I was digging in our vegetable patch when our neighbour came across the road, leant on our dry stone wall and announced: ‘You’re on the PCC’. ‘But I don’t go to church!’ was my shocked reply. ‘About time you did then’ he said. So much for the Rule Book on PCC membership.

The Benefice of Alwinton with Holystone and Alnham was 100 square miles with a population of 700. It was made up of four villages and two schools. Further up the Coquet Valley were isolated farmsteads where farmers raised sheep on the Cheviot Hills. It was a very close-knit and supportive community where life was centred on both church and the village pubs.

Towards the end of my first year on the PCC and shortly before Advent we entered a period of vacancy and I suggested to the organist at Alwinton that we held a Nine Lessons and Carols Service. It was her response that really started my full involvement in the church: ‘Good! Your idea so you organise it!’ There was no choir and between us we trained over a dozen enthusiastic people from scratch. It may not have been a top quality rendering but it was a community effort and that choir is still going.

After Christmas the new Rector (Bob) arrived and I became more involved with life in the benefice. It was after a particular PCC that when I got home I said to Rosemary: ‘I must phone Bob and ask about Reader ministry’. She insisted I did it there and then, I argued about the lateness in the evening but eventually I picked up the phone. After my question Bob said: ‘You won’t believe me Ben but I have just said to Sue. I wonder when Ben



Above the village of Harbottle which lies in Coquetdale within the Cheviot Hills.

will phone about becoming a Reader?’ Within three years, I was licensed as a Reader in Newcastle Diocese.

There was one aspect of the in-house training that followed that proved invaluable whenever I was preaching. On the Saturday evening the Rector and I would go to Alwinton Church – a large church for a village with an abnormally high pitched ceiling. This made voice projection difficult, especially in the days before sound systems. Bob would sit at the very back to listen and would pass constructive comment both on voice quality and content. How important that has proved to be.

The Eucharist was celebrated every Sunday at both Alwinton and Holystone and regardless of whether I was preaching or not we would be together in partnership. It was a most fruitful period to have had particularly at the early stage of ministry, but it could not have prepared me for what was to come.

Our next incumbent quite simply made it obvious that he did not want to recognise the Reader ministry and made my position very difficult. This was something I have come to discover that other Readers experience too. The support from the community

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was wonderful which was of immense help; at one point, the Church Wardens reminded him that his appointment to the Benefice was temporary while that of a Reader was permanent. Eventually things came to a head and the Diocese stepped in to resolve the situation. Not an easy time but life is not always so and there are lessons to learn.

With the arrival of our next priest came change and I found myself welcomed not simply as a Reader but as friend and colleague. We worked as a team, with regular meetings, sharing pastoral duties and I took a share of the funerals. The schedule of the Eucharist service changed and alternated between Alwinton and Holystone because the villages are not far apart and it resulted in the 'bringing together' of two Christian congregations and a richness to church life. Each Sunday we processed together side by side before and after the Eucharist and, oddly enough, that broadened the potential of my pastoral ministry. I can only guess it was because the Reader was seen as not just 'a helper' who was allowed to preach once a month, but as an integral part of the ministerial team.

Like many other Readers, funerals

have been an important part of my ministry, usually in our Benefice these were burials. The priest or minister was expected to give an address covering the main attributes of the deceased within the context of the Christian faith, while it was rare for a member of the family or a friend to add anything. Funerals often demonstrated the community's support for one another so the church was generally full. On one occasion, following an agricultural accident, over two hundred people were counted as being in attendance. Funerals are also occasions when things can go wrong, like the coffin jamming at the Committal. The only time I took a cremation though an incident occurred that created light relief. The crematorium is around forty miles from Alwinton. The undertaker led the convoy in his 1950s Austin hearse which broke down just as we reached the A1 at Morpeth – and there were still ten miles to go! Following the hearse was the deceased's son in his short wheel based Land Rover Defender. There was no alternative but to put the coffin in the back, otherwise we would miss our slot at the crematorium. Unfortunately, it overhung the back of the Land Rover

by a few feet and was in danger of falling out so the answer was to sit on it. What the passengers in passing cars thought as we travelled down the dual carriage way, I can only guess!

Opportunities can arise for Readers to break new ground, such as when I was asked to preach to the local Plymouth Brethren – 'No cassock, please'. It turned out they wanted to present a less severe front to the wider community without upsetting their more traditional members and, apparently, at this stage they felt that inviting a priest to preach would not go down well. What developed out of this though was both surprising and positive; at their suggestion all the denominations joined together for an Ecumenical Alpha Course, and from that grew 'Churches Together' services. Once a month, Christians from all traditions would meet together in worship at a different location where the address was given by a non-resident minister. A further development was that at village fêtes or at the three agricultural shows there would always be the 'Churches Together' marquee with church members in attendance to answer questions and give pastoral care.

Rosemary and I had lived in the Coquet Valley for thirty years when we made the difficult decision to move nearer to our families who now lived south. The community had taught me so much. We had shared joy, we had shared tragedy and through those moments in life it had been a privilege to serve Christ and them as their Reader.

As Readers we are all 'called' by the Holy Spirit into Christ's service, and for me there is a pattern of life that has become clear. When I had decided to leave Kelham and not continue studying for the Priesthood, I became detached mentally from the whole environment. One evening, after Compline, I was sitting in the chapel pretending to pray so as not to be seen as too eager to leave, yet all I wanted was to get out. It was then though that I became aware of Christ sitting near me; the power of his Presence was overwhelming. After a time he simply said: 'From now on I will never leave you'. When I look back at my life and ministry he has not only kept his word, he has shaped all that I am.



Ben Harvey is a retired Reader now living in Chichester Diocese.

Humour in the Bible: New Testament storytelling

Following on from his article on humour in the Old Testament in the previous issue, Giles Morrison asks, 'Did Jesus, master storyteller that he was, tell jokes?'

The Bible has been one of the world's central works of literature for over a millennium and has contributed many phrases to our vocabulary: 'Eye for an eye' (Matt 5: 38), 'Fly in the ointment' (Ecclesiastes 10: 1), 'Pride comes before a fall' (Proverbs 16: 18), 'Blind leading the blind' (Matt 15: 13–14), 'Fall from grace' (Galatians 5: 4), 'He's not the Messiah. He's a very naughty boy'.

Actually, we can't attribute that last one to Mary! You may recognise it as a quote from Monty Python's *Life of Brian*. As pop culture references go, this one might split congregations between offence and amusement. I use this only to demonstrate the enduring impact such references can have. 'These are not the droids you're looking for' Ben Kenobi tells the Imperial Stormtroopers in Star Wars.

Such phrases have found their way into common usage, but their Biblical origins have largely been lost. These are powerful tools to the storyteller, because they have become embedded in the social psyche.

'The name's Paul. Paul the Tentmaker.' OK, so it doesn't carry the debonair flair of Ian Fleming's character, but we're immediately put in mind of a particular sort of story, which we can build upon.

This is using the storyteller's art to connect with our audience. We have the greatest example in Jesus, who was a master storyteller. As preachers we need to value the importance of storytelling as much as good exegesis with a light seasoning of Greek, Hebrew or Aramaic. The Jesuit writer James Martin suggests that overfamiliarity with Old and New Testament stories has desensitised people to them.¹ The storyteller can bring new life to the treasures in the storehouse of biblical story.

Have you heard the one about the camel?

If we approach the Synoptic Gospels as a storyteller, we know that Jesus told memorable stories using images and

language that appealed to an illiterate, agrarian society. Yes, he could mix it up with the theological leaders of his day, but he spent far more of his time talking to 'ordinary' people. When speaking to these crowds, did Jesus tell jokes? Did he use humour? This is a challenging question, because it brings us crashing into tension between the divinity of 'Christ' and the humanity of 'Jesus'.

If we approach the Synoptic Gospels expecting to meet the Divine Christ, we will receive a different impression than if we encounter the human Jesus. This will affect our Christology and how we present him in our preaching.

Having a sense of humour is one thing. We can perhaps accept that of Jesus, but can we say that Jesus told jokes? Let's see if we can find evidence of Jesus' sense of humour.

Disciples' nicknames

Matt 16: 17–18: Peter – 'The Rock'

Jesus gave a number of disciples nicknames. Such names build relationship and camaraderie among a group. The most well-known may be Simon-Peter. This is Peter who recognises the Messiah, who (briefly) walks on water, whose enthusiasm occasionally outstripped his discretion. In Aramaic Peter is *cephas*, or 'stone' and Petrus in Latin. Does this play on words suggest angularity or sharpness in his personality, or stolid bluntness, reflected in a playful nickname – Rocky?²

Mark 3:17: The Sons of Thunder

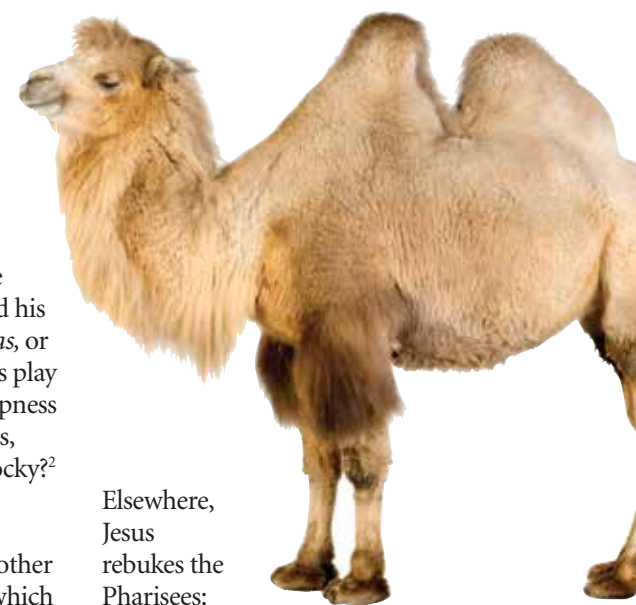
To James son of Zebedee and his brother John he gave the name Boanerges, which in Aramaic means 'Sons of Thunder'. This is recorded at the point where Jesus chose his disciples (Mark 3: 13–17). Did it reflect on their temper¹ or was it their zeal as disciples? It doesn't appear to have disqualified them as apostles!

That Jesus gave his disciples 'jokey' nicknames suggests not only that Jesus enjoyed a sense of humour, but

that during the period of his earthly ministry the disciples were growing in camaraderie. While they were walking and talking together during this time, group dynamics would have been established. There would have been banter between the disciples about what Jesus said as they walked along, puzzling over what Jesus meant by his parables.

Camel jokes

Jesus tells the crowds that 'it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God' (Matt 19: 24), a phrase which has been subject to much analysis about small gates and laden camels. Would peasants in rural Israel have known about this gate? Or is it just an absurdity, a ridiculous image to make a point? We clearly can't debate this as having any architectural basis.



Elsewhere, Jesus rebukes the Pharisees: 'You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel' (Matt 23: 24). People are not well known for actually eating whole camels. This is using the ridiculous to make a point, which implies that the phrase about the camel and the eye of the needle was also intentionally absurd.

Cleanliness and bodily functions

In Matthew 23, Jesus continues: 'Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees,

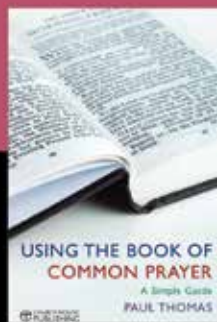


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(Bible translations are from the New International Version [NIV] unless otherwise specified.)

¹ Martin, J. (2012) *Between Heaven and Mirth*. HarperOne.

² <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/spirituality-humor>

you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.’ (Matt 23: 25–26). The mockery of cleaning the outside of the dish would be clear to every listener and a stinging rebuke to those addressed. This demonstrates that Jesus was not above even using sarcasm when necessary.

Well, Jesus was criticised for his very human eating and drinking (Matt 11:18–19) and there is nothing more viscerally human than the unavoidable biological consequences of eating and drinking. But Jesus, really? Well, read on ...

‘Are you still so dull?’ Jesus asked them. ‘Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body?’ (vv. 16–17)

This is first century Palestine and although the Romans were in residence their influence did not extend to indoor plumbing for all their subjects! No doubt squatting by the side of the road was a familiar sight as people travelled around. There would be none of today’s squeamishness about bodily functions. Jesus uses strong imagery to distinguish between purity laws and what actually causes ‘uncleanness’.

Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, ‘Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a man can make him “unclean” by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him “unclean”’ (Mark 7: 14–15)

Stereotypes/caricature

Jesus uses vivid imagery to highlight the hypocrisy of those quick to tell others how to live, while failing to live up to those same standards. Out of the human desire for power comes the desire to control, to have authority. ‘Take the plank out of your own eye!’ (Matt 7: 3–5) directed at those who exercised control, would have got a laugh. Especially coming from a carpenter.

And then there is the parable of the pharisee and the tax collector:

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: ‘Two men went up to the temple to pray.’ (Luke 9–14)

Reference

³ <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/spirituality-humor>

Here Jesus presents two caricatures, which must have been familiar to his audience. Human desire for power and authority led the pharisee to self-righteousness and arrogance. Know anyone like that? I can just imagine Jesus putting on a well-fed, pompous voice when acting out the role of the pharisee. Tax collectors were hated, Jews who worked for the Romans. Yet, this man humbled himself. The counterpoint to the pillar of society, the pharisee, is contrasted to the social outcast who went home justified.

Sitcom

In using humour in preaching, we might re-write a story from the perspective of a minor character. There is an example of re-writing John 6: 1–21, the feeding of the 5000 from three characters’ perspectives at: <https://wp.me/p41a9H-5B>. (Joseph Ben Arkwright was a minor biblical character upon whom Ronnie Barker’s famous shopkeeper may have been based!)

John’s gospel focuses on presenting the divinity of Christ. At the end (Chapter 21) Jesus appears to the disciples after his resurrection. This is the divine Christ. The disciples, not knowing what else to do, have gone back to the familiar, fishing all night and catching nothing. Jesus (at this point just some bloke in the pre-dawn gloom standing in the mist by the side of the lake) tells them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. By the miraculous catch of fish they recognise Jesus. The ever-impetuous Peter jumps into the water and they rush to the shore, where ‘they saw a fire of burning coals there, with fish on it, and some bread (John 21: 9). Peter is standing there, weary after a night’s fishing, dripping wet from the waist down. He looks at Jesus. He looks down at the fire. He looks back up at Jesus. Ask yourself ‘Where did Jesus get the fish?’ Was there a twinkle in Jesus’ eye as he looked back at Peter, demonstrating his divinity is meeting human need with a simple meal; an example of how we can have confidence that our greater needs can be met?

Storyteller or Stand-up?

Although the Gospels record key moments in Jesus mission around Israel, it is likely that Jesus used many of his stories on any number of occasions. This may be part of what drew the crowds to him, that he spoke

unlike anyone else, like one who had authority (Mark 1: 22). I can just imagine a crowd listening to Jesus and someone shouting ‘Do the camel joke’ and Jesus smiling wryly at a crowd who persisted in missing the point.

Jesus used humour to highlight issues, point out people’s foibles, especially the humourless Priests, Levites, etc. I wonder whether our ability to approach the Gospels with good humour is indicative of our ability to change? If our faith is fixed, how can it grow? Humour shares a root with humility – humus,³ compost, essential for growth! Is the ability to laugh at ourselves and our futile attempts to exercise control over our lives a prerequisite for repentance, recognising where we have gone wrong, believing that we, not God, are in control? I think our natural reaction to the immanence of God in creation must be one of joy, which is demonstrated in our ‘good’ humour.

It is hard for us to conceive of this divine Christ, the healer, miracle worker, as having a sense of humour, let alone cracking jokes. When considering the divine Christ, we are conscious of the foreshadowing of the Passion throughout Jesus’ ministry. This is quite rightly not a subject for levity. Yet we are made in the ‘image of God’ (Genesis 1: 26–28) and we have a sense of humour. If Jesus was fully human, it is reasonable to suppose that he had a sense of humour. If we were to argue that Jesus didn’t have a sense of humour, would we be somehow diminishing his humanity? If we focus on the divine, we risk presenting a model of behaviour which is unattainable in this life, leading to feelings of guilt and falling short.

If we present Jesus in His full humanity, we offer the perfect example of humanity, but one to which we can aspire in this life. In doing so we will, through the Spirit, be creating opportunities for the Kingdom to break through, bringing the Divine into our lives. Humour may enable conversation and interaction that worthy discourse may not achieve.



Giles Morrison is a Reader at St. Mary’s, Bramall Lane, Sheffield and Deputy Warden of Readers (Sheffield) for Sheffield Diocese. Follow him on Twitter @giles_morrison or access his blog at <http://t.co/KDb7uNOibC>

Humour in the Bible: it’s no laughing matter...

Recalling the description by Isaiah of the Messiah as ‘a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering’¹

Richard Appleton takes the opposite point of view from that of the previous article, arguing that Jesus did not use humour in any of his spoken and subsequently transcribed words, based on the accepted canon that is our Bible.



A good place to start is with a definition of ‘humour’, though for brevity this will be a twenty-first century definition, not one from the decades before and centuries following Jesus’ birth. The Cambridge English Dictionary defines humour as: ‘*The ability to find things funny, the way in which people see that some things are funny, or the quality of being funny*’ while Chambers defines it as: ‘*A mental quality which apprehends and delights in the ludicrous and mirthful; that which causes mirth and amusement; playful fancy*’.

Clearly, as with beauty, the understanding and interpretation of humour is subjective and will depend on the eye and ear of its beholder. The concept of humour within a society or culture is also important. We cannot know with certainty whether the Jews and Gentiles of Jesus’s era were conscious of, and used humour in their day to day life. Debate exists over the origin of the concept of the ‘joke’, one of the hallmarks of humour. Some consider it was in Ancient Greece in the third century after Christ’s birth, even though Greek comedy plays were enacted centuries before this time with

a political, fantastical or social theme. Others consider it was in Ancient Rome. The humour of the Romans, uninvited guests of Israel in Jesus’ lifetime, was slapstick, unrefined and often personal in character². It is most unlikely that in our own country, the Victorians, Edwardians or the current House of Windsor would have ever countenanced a humorous Jesus.

Finally and importantly, the interpretation of humour may also be skewed. What commentators describe as humour may more appropriately be defined as irony, satire, sarcasm or even cynicism. These wider interpretations are highly unlikely to be consistent with Jesus’ behaviour and character. One web-quote I found included the following: ‘Throughout his ministry Jesus displays great wit, command of the language, a gift for irony and word plays, and impeccable timing – all hallmarks of great comedians. This subjective opinion is completely at odds with Jesus’ often straight talking: ‘All you need to say is simply “Yes” or “No”; anything beyond this comes from the evil one’ (Matt 5: 37), although it is appreciated this was said in the context of unnecessary and unjustified oath-taking.

Our source material: the Bible

Any opinion on Jesus’ character, including his humour, can and should only be based on what is written within the Gospels, or possibly an interpretation of Paul’s letters to the early Christian churches. Although Paul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, there is some debate and with no irrefutable evidence, that he may have talked and walked with Jesus as did the disciples. Consequently, the problem with using Paul’s letters as a factual source is that he is likely to have introduced his own interpretation on what he had heard or, less likely, read from any early amanuenses of the accounts of Jesus.

An obvious area of uncertainty is in the interpretation of the spoken word, the initial form of communication. Those who heard Jesus’ words may, following his death and resurrection, have recounted them in a slightly different way, a well-recognised phenomenon in both secular life, as well as in the synoptic Gospels. Further opportunities for Jesus’s words to be misrepresented or misinterpreted would then arise in the subsequent transcription of the spoken to the written word. The

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(Bible translations are from the New International Version [NIV] unless otherwise specified.)

¹ Isaiah 53: 3.

² Beard, M (2014) *Laughter in Ancient Rome*. USA: University of California Press.

Gospels were written in Greek of which they were a translation from the spoken language, Aramaic, Jesus' own language. Consequently, words and phrases and their true meaning as spoken by Jesus may have been at best misinterpreted or at worst completely 'lost in translation'. Some or all of these issues would have been simmering in the background even before Christians of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries began to analyse and interpret scripture and the character and emotions of Jesus.

Finally, but not necessarily of any less importance, is the fact we have very little information on how Jesus spoke; his emphasis on certain words, his facial expression and body language and all the non-verbal communication that often says so much more than the spoken word. We know Jesus showed emotion in his words; frustration, exasperation and even irritation with the disciples (e.g. with Peter in Matt 16: 23); anger in the temple; compassion (e.g. Matt 20: 34); sorrow and despair and weeping over the death of his friend Lazarus and the future destruction of Jerusalem. Although there are many references to joy and, to a lesser extent, happiness in the Gospels, which will inevitably generate smiles and laughter, this should not be interpreted as reflecting humour.

The Gospels can never be described as humorous. Jesus never made jokes or witticisms of any type and certainly never at the expense of another person and their feelings, or himself. The words, 'humour', 'mirth' and 'joke' do not appear in the New Testament³. Laughter is cited only once in the synoptic Gospels and this was expressed not by Jesus, but by those to whom he was talking (Luke 8: 53). The laughter was over a girl believed to be dead with Jesus asserting she only slept. On hearing Jesus's words, those weeping and wailing, suddenly stopped, and '...only laughed at him'. This could not have been generated by mirth but was clearly empty, mocking laughter.

Although Jesus did not laugh in the Canonical Gospels, he did in one of the Gnostic Gospels, the Gospel of Judas.⁴ This laughter was sarcastic, laughing

at, rather than with his disciples, and also at their faith. From what we know and as Christians, believe about Jesus, this is not credible; sarcasm, scorn and spitefulness cannot equate with a Jesus of humility, compassion and love.

As well as the characteristic sermon format, Jesus used parables, stories or analogies. Some had a slightly bizarre or 'off-the-wall' format to make his listeners sit up and take notice: 'Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?' (Luke 11: 11–12); 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of the needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God' (Mark 10: 25). Whatever the style of the parable, each had a real and contemporary theme to make his message alive, a skill shown by all good storytellers.

Jesus also used hyperbole and exaggeration – for example when telling his disciples it would be better to pull their eyes out than commit adultery, or better to cut off a part of the body than risk displeasing God and going to hell (Matt 5: 29); or 'Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?' (Luke 6: 41). Some argue Jesus would have said this with humour to create an impression. However, I believe this style was used to express the seriousness of his message; making it funny would diminish if not completely negate the impact.

Proponents of Jesus using humour in his teaching would assert that good storytellers would never dismiss or avoid humour as a means to reach and hold an audience. This may be true, but some of the greatest storytellers and preachers have never used humour and Jesus was no ordinary storyteller. The assertion also assumes Jesus' audience would have recognised humour, in its narrowest (i.e. funny) or broadest (ironic, mocking, sarcastic) sense which may be inaccurate. They would also argue that another manifestation of Jesus's humour was mockery, typically of the self-righteous Pharisees and the Jewish leaders for their behaviour

and hypocrisy. Rebuke, plainly and directly given through love, rather than mockery would be, and was throughout the Gospels, the more appropriate description of Jesus' language in these situations.

Other views about Jesus and humour

It is impossible within this brief article to cite the literature of all theologians, Christian apologists and commentators that reflect on this issue. There was no reference to Jesus having, or using humour in a number of the books in my understandably selective 'library' which write about the character of Jesus, either as an historical person, or a man of faith and divinity^{5–9}. Although authors such as Adrian Plass offer a funny and at times somewhat risqué approach to religion and Christianity, in part to stop taking ourselves too seriously, this cannot imply this was also Jesus' style. CS Lewis's books, *The Screwtape Letters*¹⁰ and *Screwtape Proposes a Toast* are mischievously humorous with the mischief perpetrated by two devils at the expense of humans and are clearly the antithesis of Jesus' humour, had it existed. *The Name of the Rose*,¹¹ an early monk murder mystery novel, includes a theme on laughter and specifically its place in 'religion'. Jorge (a Benedictine monk) argues that comedy and laughter are characteristics of Satan and therefore evil, while William (a Franciscan friar) argues that laughter is acceptable in the sight of God. Jorge opined that Jesus neither laughed nor 'told comedies or fables'. He continued, 'Laughter shakes the body, distorts the features of the face, makes man similar to the monkey', which was appropriately challenged and refuted by William. CS Lewis would seem to have subtly sided with some but probably not all of Jorge's views as revealed by *Screwtape* and *Wormwood*.¹⁰

Other web-based commentators have cited Jesus' relationship with Peter as an example of his humour. This relates to Jesus calling Peter the 'rock', saying, '... you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church' (Matt 16: 18). It has been suggested Jesus would have

said this 'with a sly smile on his face'. This is not tenable, even with Jesus knowing the future – Peter's continuing misunderstandings and mistakes and denial before, eventually, fulfilling his trust in 'building' the Christian church. Jesus's assigned task to Peter, his prediction and the context in which the words were said mitigated levity or humour among the disciples.

Conclusion

The predominant representation of Jesus' words and behaviour throughout the Gospels is of seriousness and solemnity. However, most of us will imagine moments during his teaching, preaching and healing when he would have been happy, even smiling, although it should be noted that 'smile' and 'smiling' do not appear in the Concordance.³ Jesus's happiness and joy are wholly credible because that is what love and serving others is about; seeing God in action also makes us smile. You simply cannot love without smiling, no matter how infrequent or transient this may be. Had Jesus smiled, or even laughed, it would have been in joy and not in humour; I believe this distinction is important.

Laughter is certainly 'good medicine' as is echoed in the Yiddish saying, 'What soap is to the body, laughter is to the soul'. Laughter allows us to face the dirtier and darker aspects of life with calmness and grace. It is often said that life without humour would be unbearable; I believe the more appropriate maxim would be that life without happiness and joy would be unbearable.

We have been given a role model in Jesus and also a pattern for our life, as Paul outlined to the Christian Church in Galatia: 'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control'. Humour was not included in this list. I do not believe Jesus was a humorous man and did not use humour in his teaching and preaching, irrespective of how humour is defined. Our task is to make Jesus known to everyone but we must take care in not moulding his character on our personal perceptions and prejudices.



Richard Appleton is a Reader in St Edmundsbury and Ipswich Diocese, and an Honorary Professor in Paediatric Neurology.

Preaching the Resurrection: a lifelong process

How can we help our listeners rediscover something of the excitement of Easter morning, when some of those present are occasional visitors only and others know the story almost too well? Peter Stiling gives some suggestions.

Resurrection is a life-long process, but that first Easter morning it was entirely new. So preaching on Easter Sunday gives one an opportunity to present something which may be thought provoking but not too obscure or at an overly intellectually level. But care must also be taken to make it accessible to all the congregation.

Some themes and readings can appear 'easy' at first sight, but not when one looks more closely. A danger on Easter Sunday is to focus just on the well-known story of the empty tomb – even though this is of central importance to our Faith. What I ask when preparing to write a sermon is, can I provoke another way of understanding a given Biblical text? Am I approaching the task prayerfully, and with humility? Might the Holy Spirit be 'nudging' to offer something different, something that might speak to the congregation?

The last time I was on rota to preach at Easter, I thought hard about how best to prepare. I looked up the dictionary definition of 'Resurrection', and found there were a number of suggestions as well as the definition of Resurrection as a term used by Christians to describe Jesus rising from dead following his crucifixion – a core tenet of our faith. Alternative terms included: renewal, awakening, rebirth, stimulation, re-establishment and revitalisation. It was tempting to expand on some of the definitions on Sunday and in this article, but I resisted as that would have been a distraction.

So, instead, I focused on the idea that we may all have experienced 'resurrection' in the form of these definitions, but not seen such events as coming from God. If we see the possibility of God-given resurrection at work in our lives, the question then is this: would we see these events in our lives differently if we saw them as coming from God?

There are several examples in the Bible of people who had an expectation of resurrection. The widow of Nain whose son had died, Martha and Mary

mourning their brother Lazarus, Peter and family when his mother-in-law lay sick, the man possessed we know as Legion, the blind and lame; all these and others, I suggest, can be seen as having experienced some sense of resurrection.

Often when we pray for a joyous event, or the resolution of a difficulty, or for the overcoming of a problem, might our feeling of a prayer answered be enhanced by seeing the outcome in terms of a resurrection? Such an approach may help us to feel nearer to God, and give us a greater sense of being 'made in his image and likeness' (Genesis 1: 26–28). And if we also apply a theology of resurrection to the receiving of Communion, then our experience here can be enhanced. We might be more conscious of meeting with the Holy Spirit and feel a sense of renewal, and perhaps some awakening, rebirth, stimulation, re-establishment and revitalisation. We are not the original disciples but we too are offered the gift of the Holy Spirit, poured upon them that first-century Pentecost (Acts 2: 1–3). While we acknowledge that we are fallible mortals, God through his grace can enable us to become so much more like the people he designed us to be.

This can be just as true of those people who are new to church, or who have come on a Festival day like Easter because they are with family and 'feel they should', as it can for those who are regular church goers.

Our resurrection and our receiving of the Holy Spirit will be expressed in a different way from that of the first disciples, but God will equip us for our own context. And the expression of our discipleship will change as our circumstances change and the challenges we meet change too. Resurrection is a lifelong process – for us all.



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¹¹ Eco, U (First published in 1980); (2004) *The Name of the Rose*. London: Vintage.

Preaching the Resurrection: Peter's story

One way of engaging our listeners is by using story. Clare Masters provides a fresh approach to the events of Easter through the eyes of Peter. Extracts from her two-part piece are shared here.

Clare's reflection is in two parts. In the first part, Peter introduces himself, and then takes us through the events of Holy Week. He is enthusiastic at first, but then starts to feel anxious:

I was full of excitement and anticipation, waiting for our great Passover celebration and a chance to enjoy some real team bonding time after many months of exhausting ministry out on the road. But as the next few days went by, Jesus became gradually more and more serious. He kept mentioning worrying things like 'suffering' and 'going away'. To be honest it was all getting a bit disconcerting. Especially when Mary turned up after supper one evening and decanted a whole flask of lavish perfume all over Jesus... and he just looked mega-thoughtful and defended her by saying she had anointed him for burial. That was too freaky by far. I didn't like that at all.

Later in the week, the team meet to share the Passover meal – 'at last', says Peter, 'it seemed there was some forward planning which, despite my impetuous nature, I found strangely reassuring'. But he is completely taken aback by his master preparing to wash his feet – and those of his dusty, embarrassed companions. And then the meal begins:

Soon the age-old prayers of remembrance and rescue were washing over us, and we ate... the mouth-watering taste of roast lamb contrasting with the zingy bitter herbs. Abruptly I realised it had all gone quiet. Jesus had paused at the end of the familiar rhythm of the Passover words, and was gazing thoughtfully at the flatbread in his hand. 'This is my body,' he said. He tore the unleavened bread slowly in half. 'Broken for you.' Then he broke the bread into smaller pieces and passed it round to each of us. We each held our little morsel, wondering. 'Eat it', he said, 'in

remembrance of me'. Each of us obediently popped our piece of bread into our respective mouths and chewed manfully. The bread stuck to the roof of my mouth, and the dryness made me feel suddenly afraid. Jesus reached forward and picked up the large goblet of wine in front of him. 'And drink this', he said, 'It's like a new covenant, my blood poured out for you.' And taking a sip himself, he passed the goblet to Jack and gestured to him to pass it on round the table. When the cup reached me, I took a big



gulp of the sweet dark wine, and prayed silently for courage.

After dinner we'd usually all soon be deep in various animated conversations and discussions, but that night Jesus was strangely intense, repeatedly saying things like 'Whatever happens, remember this: love each other. And although I have to go away, I will send help. And I will come back for you.'

'What do you mean, Lord?' I asked. 'Can I come too? You know I'd do anything for you, I'm ready to go to prison for you, even lay down my life for you!' Perhaps my prayer for courage had been answered.

Jesus gazed at me again, with that look. 'You can't come, Simon,' he said, ever so gently. Why was he using my old name? 'In fact, Simon, you're going to be dreadfully tested tonight, and before the cock crows in the morning, you will have denied three times that you even know me. But I've prayed for you, Simon, that your faith will not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.'

I just stared at him. What a preposterous thing to say. But I didn't even feel brave enough to argue.

In the middle of the night, in the garden where Jesus and three of his closest companions have withdrawn to pray, Peter finds his strength ebbing away. They are ambushed by soldiers and Jesus is arrested.

They took him in the direction of the High Priest's house – the religious authorities had had it in for Jesus right from the beginning. So eventually I skulked along at a chicken-hearted distance behind. Next to the High Priest's house was a courtyard, with a charcoal fire burning. A few of the soldiers were resting outside the main entrance,

a couple of servants were going to and fro, bringing them food and drinks, and a number of other curious people were hanging about too, no doubt intrigued by the sudden flurry of night-time military activity. I was cold and scared. There was no one standing near the brazier, so I crept towards it, trying to look inconspicuous. Jesus was somewhere inside the building. I hoped he was all right.

One of the servant girls came over to collect more hot water from the cauldron dangling over the fire. I looked quickly down, casually pulling the hood of my cloak slightly across my face. 'Were you with the prisoner?' she asked. I shook my head dismissively in what I hoped was an offhand kind of manner. She wandered off with her jug of hot water, and I held my breath, but she looked back at me, and then I saw her whisper something to the other servants. The hours ticked on by. I waited, with not the slightest idea of what to do next. It was nearly dawn, when a couple of the other servants came over towards the fire, looking sideways at me. 'I'm sure you're one of them,' said one accusingly. 'No way,' I muttered. 'But you've got a Galilean accent' announced the other triumphantly. 'I don't know what you're talking about' I said, trying to make my scared voice sound angry instead. 'I don't even know the man'.

They shrugged in an 'OK, have it your way, we're not really fussed' kind of manner. It was quiet for a few seconds. And then the silence was broken by the sound of a condemnatory cockerel crowing, piercing the darkness, piercing my broken chicken heart. At that moment the door of the house opened and Jesus was led out. 'They're taking him to Pilate,' whispered one of the servants conspiratorially. Jesus' eyes met mine. I could not even hold his gaze. I dropped my head, and fled, bitter sobs bursting from my lungs.

The first part of the story leaves Peter frightened and broken. His sense of loss and failure is overwhelming.

All I can think of as I cower in a dark corner, trying to shake that image of Jesus' sorrowful face from

my mind, is that Jesus prayed for me... that my faith would not fail, and that when I have turned back, I must strengthen my brothers.

When I have turned back ... to who?

Jesus has gone.

Part Two of Peter's story begins with the Resurrection. But Peter's feelings are somewhat mixed:

It's wonderful, brilliant: Jesus is alive. Well, it's wonderful and brilliant for the others. For me, swirled in with the joy, is the memory of that last time Jesus had met my gaze, the acrid smell of the charcoal fire in the courtyard, and then the chill in my soul as I stumbled away in shame. Because I'd failed him, denied I even knew him.

Maybe, he feels, because he has failed Jesus, he will no longer be wanted. 'Maybe', he says, 'I'd better go back to what I used to do. Simon the fisherman. The old life. No more of this Peter the disciple stuff.' So he says, 'I'm going fishing'.

We see it from inside, the glory of that first Easter, the man on the beach who dares tell them how to fish, the dawning realisation that it is Jesus himself, the barbecue of fish, reunion and fellowship. And then it is Peter's turn for resurrection.

And after we have shared breakfast, as the group chatter together, Jesus catches my eye and beckons me to stroll with him along the shoreline away from the others. My heart thumps. Wisps of charcoal smoke drifting along from the beach bonfire sear into my lungs and my memory.

And then, right there on the beach, Jesus gently but firmly does some cardiac surgery, mending my broken heart.

'Simon, Son of John, do you love me more than these?'

He calls me by my old name: Simon, the fisherman, John's son. Almost as if he was meeting me for the first time. I don't have to pretend that I'm Peter, the Distinguished Disciple, the Rock.

I look round at the old fishing stuff and the happy bunch of disciples behind them, and answer: 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.'

'Great,' says Jesus. 'You're forgiven. You're in, you're part of this team. Feed my lambs. I have a role that only you can fulfil in my church.'

There's a little pause.

'Simon, Son of John, do you love me?'

Ah, perhaps this is going to be rather more of a grilling after all. 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you,' I answer.

'Good,' says Jesus. 'Just making doubly sure. I'm sure, just checking that you're sure. Because you're the man I want to take care of my sheep, my church.'

Another tiny, tiny pause.

'Simon, Son of John, do you love me?'

Well, now I don't know what to say. I love Jesus so much and I want to follow him, but I know I'm a rubbish disciple, and what's worse, I know Jesus knows all that too. Being asked for a third time is just so painful. But I answer anyway. 'Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you.'

'Excellent,' says Jesus. 'That's sorted then. Feed my sheep. You're in charge of looking after Team Church.'

Clare's professional background is in medicine – and just as Jesus used examples from daily life familiar to his companions, so she draws upon her own. Peter says: 'Jesus has made me answer three times. "Yes Lord, you know I love you". A triple repair for the triple failure. I've never heard of triple bypass surgery, but you get my drift'.



Clare Masters is a Reader in the Rochester Diocese. She was the winner of the 2019 Sermon of the Year competition run by Preach magazine and the London School of Theology. If you would like a copy of Peter's Story in its full form, please email editor@cofereadermag.co.uk

Book Extract

Our featured book is *Seriously Messy: Making Space for Families to Talk Together about Death and Life* by Joanna Collicutt, Lucy Moore, Martyn Payne and Victoria Slater. Written as part of The Bible Reading Fellowship's Messy Church ministry, this book demonstrates the central importance of this often marginalised dimension of Christian discipleship.

Seriously Messy includes a wealth of appropriate family activities.

Why we wrote this book

What's this? A book about death! A book for parents and grandparents... and children? You can't be serious?

Talking of death and dying is one of those conversation topics most of us prefer to avoid – and for good reason. No one wants to be reminded that our life has to end one day. It's something we assign to the distant future – as far away as possible, in fact, so we can conveniently and hopefully forget that the day will ever arrive.

Even within church circles, Christians are often strangely reluctant to talk about death. This is especially odd when Christianity has as its central symbol the cross, which forcibly reminds us that 'Christ has died' and challenges us to 'take up our cross' – our dying – so that we might live. We can't get around this by simply spiritualising those words and thereby hoping to overlook the reality of the deaths involved, both for Christ and ultimately for us.

An awareness of our inevitable death and our attitudes towards it ought to have a huge influence on how we live our lives now. We can't have life without death, and ignoring or denying questions about death and dying is not only unhelpful but is an unhealthy response of God's gift of life to us all...

...but you also claim that this is a book for families with their children? Is the subject matter really appropriate? Surely if any book needs an 18 certificate, then it is one about death and dying, whether the readers are Christian or not? And what's more, you offer this to us with Messy Church sessions on the theme – activities and celebration ideas on death for all ages together; have the authors lost the plot?

On the contrary, the authors firmly believe that an intergenerational setting, such as Messy Church, is exactly the

place to talk about the hard questions of life. It is far too easy at such church 'family' gatherings simply to stay with the cosier and relatively easy stories linked to our faith – ones that don't ask awkward questions or open up the big issues of existence. And are we not surely in danger of being unfaithful to the gospel if we play down or, even worse, cut out all the hard sayings and difficult themes that are present in almost every Bible story? If the good news is simply reduced to statements like 'Pray and all will be well' or 'Don't worry, God will make it right again', we are being dishonest in our ministry and mission. It will mean that our children and their parents will grow up with an incomplete understanding of Christianity – one that has Photoshopped out challenging questions about suffering, pain, death and dying...

From chapter 5: Taking care when talking with children about death and loss

One reason we avoid talking with children about death is that we don't want to traumatise or inflict some permanent damage on them. If the children are not part of our family circle and we only meet them at church, and perhaps not often, then we will want to tread even more carefully. This is a good instinct, but it doesn't mean that we can't mention death and dying at all...

Take account of how children think about life and death

First idea: death as permanent separation

Preschool children appear to have little understanding of death, but by about five or six years of age children will know the word and understand that death is irreversible and happens to all living creatures. At this age, children's



ideas of causation are not very developed. They understand that death is something that is caused by external things such as poison, guns or 'bad people'. Crucially, they may wonder if they could cause a death by being naughty. It's good to be alert to this so you can offer reassurance if a child brings it up.

Although children of this age understand that death is not the same as falling asleep or going away on holiday, they quite reasonably see death as a 'kind of' falling asleep forever or going away to a place that is too far away to come back from. They have grasped that they won't see the deceased again, and the sense of separation makes them sad (to varying degrees depending on the closeness of the relationship). At this age they don't have a very developed understanding of what happens to the body of the deceased.

Second idea: death as the body stopping working

From about the age of seven, children begin to grasp the reality that death is actually going to happen personally to them and can't be avoided – it's not just something that affects old people. This is such an emotionally challenging idea (as it is for any of us) that they may

simply prefer not to think about it; this should be respected.

Also from this age, children begin to understand more about how the body works and that there are different organs for breathing, pumping blood, thinking, digesting and so on. They begin to understand that if one or more of these vital organs stops working, the body will no longer function and will simply cease. So as they begin to understand physical life better, they begin to see death as life coming to an end.

Seeing death as a biological reality in this way enriches children's overall understanding. It can make death less frightening because it is seen as a natural process...

Putting the two ideas together

As adults, we are able to hold together the psychological reality of death (separation from our loved one) with the physical reality (her bodily decay). But we find it difficult. This is why seeing the coffin at a funeral can bring us up short (and it lies behind the increasing popularity of memorial services without the body of the deceased present).

This must be even more difficult for children, hence most experts think that using phrases like 'he's fallen asleep' or 'she's gone to a better place' is not always helpful when explaining to a child that someone has died. It is always good to use clear and direct language to explain what is meant. The best way to talk about death is to use clear bodily language: 'Grandad's heart got weak and it couldn't keep him alive any more.'

But – and this is a big but – children are a lot more sophisticated than we often give them credit for. Even from a young age, they know the difference between 'Grandad's fallen asleep' and 'Grandad has died. It's like when he used to go to sleep,' especially if we are careful with our use of language...

From Part II Theological Reflections – Chapter 7 Remembering

'Remember me'

Remembering plays a central role in the life of faith too. Right through the Old Testament, God keeps reminding his people to remember him, and in

particular to remember what sort of God he is – the one who brought them safely out of Egypt against all the odds (Deuteronomy 5:15), who is true to himself, who has saved and who can be trusted to keep on saving. People are sometimes told to remember how God acted in the history of Israel (Isaiah 46:3-4; Psalm 78); at other times it's more personal: individuals remember how God has acted at key moments in their lives and this gives them hope for the future (Psalm 71:17-20).

God himself also promises to remember. In fact the relationship between God and his people seems to be one of mutual remembering. This is the nature of the covenant: God sustains people by keeping them in mind; they in turn remember him by trusting him enough to turn to him and by keeping his commandments. And it all seems to be focused on having a meal – the Passover.

This carries on into the New Testament. Jesus tells us that the prodigal son remembered – he remembered that there was 'bread enough to spare' in his father's house (Luke 15:17), so he turned around with the intent of seeking his father and committing to live in the way his father would want. But the father had never forgotten his wayward son – he was on the lookout for him. So it was mutual remembering. We could also think of this as re-remembering, a reconstruction of the son and of the relationship. And of course it all ends in a wonderful feast – the equivalent of a hog roast – which took place because 'this son of mine was dead and is alive again' (Luke 15:24).

Remembering, then, seems to be a matter of life and death; it seems to involve doing, not just thinking; it seems to be central to relationship; and in some mysterious way it's all bound up with eating.

After all, it wouldn't be a funeral without a wake.

Crafting memories, remaking people

So, in our remembering of others who are no longer with us, and in our desire to be remembered by others, we are close to the centre of our faith. Psychologists tell us that remembering is not like replaying a film – it's a creative act of reconstruction. It's also something we do together, each of us

adding details others might have forgotten. It may make us cry; more often it will make us smile, perhaps even laugh...

People who are bereaved say that the greatest comfort they receive from others comes not from expressions of sympathy but from reminiscences about the one they have lost. It assures them that they didn't just imagine their loved one. Expressing memories tells others that the person has made their mark on our lives, and it confirms that he or she really did walk this earth.

Memory is a gift from God, and when we remember we are joining with God's life-giving work.

Acknowledgements

We are most grateful to the authors and to The Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF) for permission to publish these extracts. *Seriously Messy* costs £8.99 and can be purchased from all good bookshops or online from www.brf.org.uk Our review is on page 30.

The authors



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Lucy Moore is the founder of Messy Church. She promotes Messy Church nationally and internationally through training and speaking events, and is a prolific writer whose books include Messy Hospitality and God's Word for Messy People



Martyn Payne is a teacher; until his recent retirement he worked with BRF for 15 years in its schools and churches programmes, and latterly with its Messy Church team.

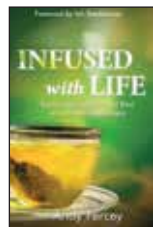


Victoria Slater is a writer, consultant and researcher who has worked as a Hospital and Hospice Chaplain for over twenty years.



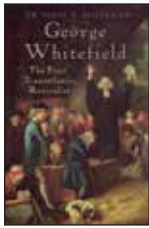
The Beginning of Tomorrow
John Gaunt Hunter
Sacristy pbk £14.99
9781789590296

This book is much more than a historical recording of an event, a process or how we have taken some huge steps towards unity. It is a narrative of ecumenical meetings and planning from 1968 in the north of England, including a focused week of mission. The story tells of significant strides forward in relationships and working together, and the significant considerations of mission and leadership are well worth reviewing in our time. It raises stimulating questions of mission and leadership. As senior Christian leaders in the north of England considered whether they could work together to support mission, they found themselves grappling with fundamental challenges about whether Christian churches and individuals believed they had a message relevant to others and one that could be communicated with any effect to those who did not believe. How we might speak into society during times of social and economic challenge is as relevant today as in the 1970s. Amidst this, the leaders and their church members were willing also to recognise the missional importance of unity in Christ being prioritised over the many differing views, discovering that each denomination includes diversity of belief and persuasions at least as significant as differences across denominations.
LINDSAY TANNER



Infused with Life
Andy Percey
Authentic Media pbk £9.99
9781788930659

This book is subtitled 'Exploring God's gift of rest in a world of busyness', trying to apply the lessons from the Bible to our contemporary world. The author is a church leader in Bath and has struggled with the demands of leading a vibrant church as well as trying to do justice in his role as a father and husband. Jung had once said that busyness was not of the Devil but was the Devil. When we are busy we can miss by constant activity that 'still small voice of God.' Andy Percey offers by his own example, and by some common sense, practical advice which can help us to find peace in any moment. I liked his idea simply to stop and not move when boiling a kettle: enjoy the moment. The fact is that we need to challenge in our churches the cult of busyness in worship, in activity and to cultivate the stillness. How can we 'Be still and know that I am God' if we are never still?
CAVAN WOOD



George Whitefield
Nigel Scotland
Lion Hudson pbk £12.99
9780745980287

'Praise the Lord, praise the Lord! Let the earth hear his voice'. Whitefield (1714-70) certainly did that with his astonishing preaching, 'news from heaven'. Thousands heard his strong voice from pulpits, in fields and open spaces. His faithfulness, sacrificial ministry, 'indefatigable diligence', thirty years of evangelising, ten in New England, twenty in Great Britain, caused the most remarkable faith upturn of the eighteenth century. He preached some 18,000 sermons, gave hundreds of addresses, crossed the Atlantic 13 times, wrote trunkfuls of letters, and pioneered the use of print media to spread his message. Ordained an Anglican, his friendship with John and Charles Wesley led to him setting up societies, small groups that met, and leading on Methodist organisation, ahead of John Wesley. One of the great revival evangelists, he 'offered Christ to all' and enjoyed his religion. He cared passionately for the poor and prisoners, founded an orphanage in Georgia, raised enormous sums of money for it and good causes, and was often away from his helpmeet wife. Scotland's admirable, inspiring biography includes criticism of his 'enthusiasm' and Calvinistic Methodism. We learn that preaching changes things; as do constant prayer, thanks and trusting God.
JEREMY HARVEY



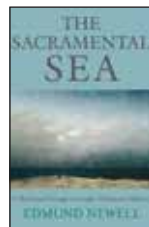
So What's the Story?
Barbara Glasson
& Clive Marsh
DLT pbk £9.99
9780232534061

The theme of this interesting book is indicated in its sub-title: A Resource Book for Christian Reflection and Practice. The authors are, respectively, the President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference for 2019/20 and in their own words 'this is a book about stories and a book of stories'. It is claimed that life is an intricate tapestry of stories and that stories enrich our knowledge of God and help us to grow in faith. The book is wide-ranging in content and does not shy away from difficult topics such as abuse and colonialism; however, because it is written in a personal style it is an easy read. Each chapter includes points for reflection, points for connection, and a suggested prayer. I can envisage this book working on an individual basis for personal reflection, but if used with a small group it would require a significant commitment from members of the group and it would need to be used in a sensitive manner.
MICHAEL FOSTER



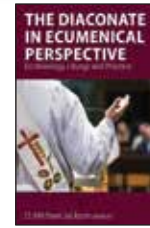
Creation as Sacrament
John Chrysavgis
T&T Clark pbk \$25.95
9780567680709

This treatise, with its Orthodox viewpoint, mixes theology, ecology, spirituality and urgent common sense. It urges me to keep playing my part in cherishing our planet and come out of my Anglican corner. It gives reasons for seeing creation as sacrament, and then suggests principles and practices which in turn call for action: a timely, compassionate book which, I hope, can become central to Christian and other ministry. Chrysavgis fears we have too narrow a view of the sacraments. His sacramental view of the world sees that 'nothing in life is profane or unsacred'. He argues that, between the Creator, 'that which sanctifies', and the creation, 'that which is sanctified', there is 'a likeness-in-the-very difference'. His theology of creation sees the world as 'fundamentally good, while remaining subject to evil and requiring redemption through the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Christ.' From this it follows that we have a choice between being 'a dog eats dog society' with a jungle ethic, or holding a sacramental worldview based on embracing persons, not financial profits, protecting all people and caring for all creatures. My heart, head and hands are with Chrysavgis and his inspiring Patriarch Bartholomew.
JEREMY HARVEY



The Sacramental Sea
Edmund Newell
DLT pbk £14.99
9780232533965

This is a profoundly interesting book about the power of the sea to shape lives and influence our self-understanding both personally and as a species. The ten short chapters are a masterly summary of the history of Christian thought and philosophy, using the sea in all its aspects as a central metaphor. Subtitled 'A spiritual voyage through Christian history', the book begins with an examination of the landlocked Jewish tradition that regarded the sea as a remnant of primordial chaos, goes on to describe it as a place of spiritual testing during the patristic period, shows how it becomes a tool for evangelism, and most importantly, how the sea's many faceted symbols enrich our sense of the divine. The sea has always fired imaginations as well as helped to clear minds that would contemplate ultimate mysteries and this well-crafted book with its extensive bibliography provides the reader with fresh insights into the nature and variety of religious experience.
KIRSTY ANDERSON



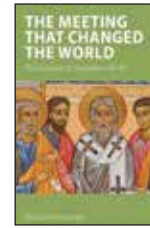
The Diaconate in Ecumenical Perspective
D. Michael Jackson (ed.)
Sacristy pbk £19.99
9781789590357

This volume resulted from a 2011 ecumenical conference on the diaconate at the University of Regina, Canada, and includes chapters on the theology of the diaconate, the transitional diaconate, women deacons, ecumenical perspectives on the diaconate, the prophetic and liturgical roles of deacons and diaconal formation. The book's broad ecumenical range makes it unusual, with contributions from the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Ukrainian Catholic, Lutheran and Methodist traditions; in addition, authors address the diaconate in the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches. The 19 chapters are succinct, but make a compelling case for ecumenical engagement on a ministry shared between the Churches but often interpreted in very different ways. Nevertheless, a common thread running through many chapters is the importance of John Collins' theology of diakonia as more than just service. The chapter on the survival of women deacons in the eastern Churches, in particular, illuminates an often overlooked and forgotten history. A weakness of the book, which will undoubtedly diminish its academic impact, is the regrettable absence of detailed references for most chapters, a bibliography and an analytical index.
FRANCIS YOUNG



Sabbath
Nicola Slee
DLT pbk £9.99
9780232533996

'Sabbath' looks like a book by a poet about another poet's poem, but it is far more than that. Slee offers us reflections on the main strands in Wendell Berry's Sabbath poem 'I go among the trees and sit still...' It is not a systematic theological treatise on Sabbath, but an invitation and exploration, following thoughts, feelings, the gifts and threats of setting time aside. Slee explores the necessity and difficulty of fitting Sabbath into our pressured and success-oriented lives, and she offers the painstaking examination of the inner life that you might expect from a poet. Her chapters are complemented by excerpts from her journal, her own poems, questions for reflection and prayers (some very searching), and blank pages for our own notes. In a few places there was more personal information about the author than I wanted, but this does not detract from the vital importance of the message of the book. 'Sabbath' won't help you preach a better sermon but, taken seriously, may help you lead a more integrated, more human and more godly life.
GERTRUD SOLLARS



The Meeting That Changed the World
Michael Knowles
Sacristy pbk £17.99
9781789590265

The argument of this book is that the Council of Jerusalem in AD49 as outlined in Acts has been underestimated. Whatever detailed negotiations led up to its conclusions, it liberated pagan Christian converts from needing to follow the full rigours of the Torah. This traumatic but necessary step changed Christianity from being a local sect into a world-transforming faith. The author, a Roman Catholic, uses this model to challenge his own Church: if it is not prepared to ordain women and accept other similar reforms, its numbers will continue to decline. He is thus revealed as the kind of Vatican II-affirming Catholic who would be sympathetic to the present Pope. He would, of course, be strongly opposed by the neo-traditionalists in his church, some of whom are showing an odd disloyalty to that very Pope whose office they claim to venerate. Although the book is perhaps too long as it trawls through the New Testament, it offers a challenge particularly relevant in this year of Cardinal Newman's canonisation: in the light of his Essay on the Development of Doctrine, how far can you embrace radical change while staying true to the deposit of faith?
ADRIAN ROBERTS



Searching for a Silent God
Sarah Parkinson
Sacristy Press pbk £8.99
9781789590388

This is Sarah Parkinson's honest, detailed spiritual journey, punctuated by self-revealing poems. We follow her through conversion; education and career moves; marriage and childbirth; the stresses of becoming a clergy-wife and a significant bereavement. Through all the changes, she is conscious of God's loving presence. The second half of the book describes how Sarah emerges from the 'grey-fog' of mourning only to realize that God has apparently deserted her. Faith says he is still around but, paradoxically, experience screams his absence. She can offer no explanations or solutions, hoping that her experiences and questions may be of help to others who are also finding it difficult to connect with God. This is a creative and well-written short book, touching on important issues of spiritual growth and times of darkness, and may be a great comfort to some. A more objective exploration of the God beyond the silence could have enriched the book further.
APRIL McINTYRE



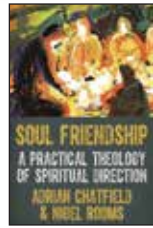
Retired and Inspired
Wendy Billington
BRF pbk £8.99
9780857467201

As a retired person, I read this book hoping to be inspired. Wendy Billington writes about retirement, its frustrations and opportunities, with care and imagination. The book's two sections deal with 'clearing weeds' and 'sowing seeds', and address retirement, loss, fear, memories, change, relationships and living for the present. It is well-structured, understandable, bible-based, and rooted in an outlook of faith and support within the local church. Each of the ten chapters contains questions for group discussion and reflection, and there is a 'thought for the day' based on the fruit of the Spirit. It is good stuff, but it did not raise my own level of inspiration very much. I enjoyed Jim's story, a chapter-by-chapter case-study of a likeable but fictitious person, and his journey through different retirement challenges. However, because Jim is fictitious, the story felt designed to bring out the points that the author wants the reader to consider. The book is written for Christians, and the level of writing is basic. It will suit those who are new to the journey of faith or discipleship, rather than those who have been on the road for rather longer. It would work well for a book club of newly retired people on the fringes of church life.
HOWARD ROWE



Following Jesus
Henri Nouwen
SPCK hbk £12.99
9780281083558

This simple, beautiful book is based on lectures by the late Henri Nouwen on following Jesus 'in an age of anxiety'. I think the age of anxiety has increased in intensity since the original talks, and that Henri Nouwen's message is more poignant than ever. From the very beginning, I felt, both by Nouwen's style and content, drawn into the presence of Jesus Christ, and that he was talking to me. The simplicity and portrayal of the message is deeply attractive. Nouwen writes on Christ's invitation and call, the challenge and cost of following Jesus, and the reward of joy, which was my favourite section. The last chapter is about the Holy Spirit and how to practise the presence of the Spirit day by day. Nouwen is very practical and never suggests that the Christian life is easy. He does, however, reveal a quiet assurance of peace and direction that is neither complex nor exhausting. The book is suitable for any time of year but would be particularly good for reading through Lent. I commend it to you with all my heart.
HOWARD ROWE



Soul Friendship
Adrian Chatfield
& Nigel Rooms
Canterbury Press pbk £16.99
9781786221568

The original version of Kenneth Leech's *Soul Friend: Spiritual Direction in the Modern World* was published in 1977, with the revised edition in 1994, and the book under review builds on this earlier seminal work. *Soul Friendship* is not so much a book about how to carry out spiritual direction; it is more concerned with the theological grounding of the practice. It considers what is theological about two people meeting regularly in order to discern the influence of God in the life of one of them. The authors' intention is that the book will be a valuable theological resource that can strengthen the depth and breadth of the practice of spiritual direction for everyone involved, whether directing or being directed. The book is written from an ecumenical perspective drawing on Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox sources, although both of the authors are Anglican priests. Each chapter (apart from the last one) concludes with a section of reflection and questions. There is a useful bibliography and index of names and subjects. I recommend this book to all Readers who are directly involved in the important ministry of spiritual direction.

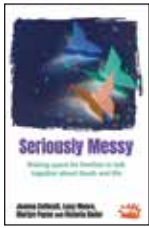
MICHAEL FOSTER



God's Calling Cards
Emily Owen
Authentic Media pbk £9.99
9781788930253

Emily Owen takes the idea of 'calling cards', fashionable in past times, to illustrate, through several well-known biblical figures such as Moses or Ananias, how God might be calling us, wanting to get to know us better. It is an interesting idea, with each chapter devoted to one character or action and operating in several ways: personal introduction; an imaginative reconstruction as to how a character might have spoken; reflections and brief prayers; biblical texts; questions for consideration or discussion and an illustration of the appropriately worded card, for example 'Believe'. The parts have varying degrees of success; those which tell Emily Owen's personal story can be deeply moving, as neurofibromatosis in her teens meant that the necessary operations left her deaf; the character's re-counts are lively and convincing; the quotations apposite. The reflections and prayers suffer from being very short, sometimes only a few words, sometimes non-sentences. Some might like this almost stream-of-consciousness approach, but others would gain from a more substantial offering.

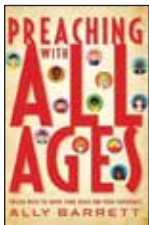
MARGARET TINSLEY



Seriously Messy
Joanna Collicutt, Lucy
Moore, Martin Payne
& Victoria Slater
BRF pbk £8.99
9780857468239

Although written for use in Messy Churches, this book is a gift to the whole church. The first half should be essential reading for everyone in ministry. Whether we are involved in children's ministry or not, we all meet parents and grandparents and teachers who want advice on how to talk to children about death. Death cafés are becoming popular with older folk, but children need to have these conversations too. Most children have experience of death, so they need the vocabulary to reflect on it. A solid theological base underpins this thoughtful book, so it contains hope and wise advice. We are encouraged to face the difficult conversations rather than to avoid an upsetting subject. There are many helpful suggestions for this. The second half includes five full Messy Church sessions. These contain a wealth of ideas for discussing issues of decay, loss, remembering, hope and safe spaces, which could be used in many different settings. This book is a challenge to include discussion of death in our exploration of the fullness of life.

RONA ORME



Preaching with All Ages
Ally Barrett
Canterbury Press pbk £14.99
9781786221711

Church is for adults to worship and children to learn. No! All ages do both. This book is highly recommended for anyone who preaches – not just at intergenerational services. The author describes twelve different services, each followed by a critical appraisal. This provides a pattern of reflective practice as well as twelve cracking ideas. For example the triangle of the prodigal son and father and brother is embodied in a triangle of very long ribbons – dramatically broken, and if repaired, restored in a bow which wonderfully shortens the distance of the relationship. This is followed by a reflection on spiritual styles and 'honouring the diversity of the congregation'. The book contains such treasures, with added website recommendations and, not least, examples of the insights contributed by children: 'I think that not being able to see Christ until you kneel is like when a computer screen is low so you have to kneel to see it (the reason for this is because God is angled towards the earth)'. Ally Barrett goes straight to the top of my list of intergenerational resources.

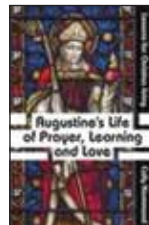
ROSIE MEDHURST



What do we do with the Bible?
Richard Rohr
SPCK hbk £9.99
9780281083213

This ultra-short book (70 pages) on a pithy and punchy application to the Bible promised much but unfortunately delivered little. The first three chapters focus on the misinterpretation and abuse of the Bible by those who are not Spirit-led and how this has contributed to centuries of chaos and conflict in religion and society. The final chapter, 'The Jesus Hermeneutic' seeks to answer the book's question, which, Rohr says, is: 'To use the Bible the way that Jesus did!' Jesus did not have access to the Bible as we know it and his citations from the OT were selective, so this answer is unhelpful. I re-read this book with accelerating disappointment and frustration. The writing is punctuated by innumerable words and phrases in brackets, italics (the latter for additional emphasis), or both. Consequently, the book's flow is interrupted and further muddies any message. One phrase resonated, on page 14: 'Basically, if we are not positively excited about our religion, it does not work for us in any meaningful way' but even here, 'faith' or 'Jesus', and not 'religion' may have been more apposite.

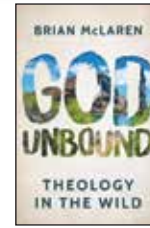
RICHARD APPLETON



Augustine's Life of Prayer, Learning and Love
Cally Hammond,
BRF pbk £8.99
9780857467133

Cally Hammond has written a trilogy of books on prayer and recently published her new edition and translation of Augustine's Confessions. She has studied ancient history and literature and now teaches New Testament Greek and early Christian history at Cambridge. The result is an intriguing book with each chapter following a similar format, analysing parts of Augustine's life, interspersed with quotations from his works, followed by a 'Bible passage for reflection', questions for discussion, and a prayer drawn from his writings. The nine chapters take us on a journey through Augustine's life where the author explores issues such as his faith, conversion, teaching, prayer, his deep devotional life and the struggles he experienced in faith. This book is packed with insights into the great man's life. Many books have been written about Augustine, but here is one which will encourage us to delve deeper into his Confessions in a new way: a book for personal interest that could well be used in small groups.

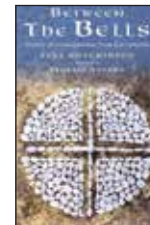
HUGH MORLEY



God Unbound: Theology in the Wild
Brian McLaren
Canterbury Press pbk £14.99
9781786222015

Any book enthusiastically endorsed by Barbara Brown Taylor will always catch this reader's attention, and thus I reviewed with anticipation. The writer explores the Galapagos Islands as might Attenborough (or Bryson), musing on his experiences as part of a tour party. The text is littered with photos and quotes, most notably: 'The Glory of the Lord is written plainly upon all the fields of every clime, and upon every sky...' (per Psalm 19:1) which encapsulates the book's theme, underpinned by the author: '...the risen Christ is with us... and every creation is an icon of the divine.' Theology (I believe) is the study of the nature of God, whereas the writer seems to see it as the study of nature made by God. I have no real problem with his view, but wanted much more from him defining and shaping this 'Wild' study. As an entertaining, thoughtful eco-travelogue – recommended. As a timely reminder to better steward and more fully appreciate God's Creation – recommended. As a 'life-changing voyage' (Ms Taylor's words) then my recommendation is more tempered. A good book, yes; life-changing, no...

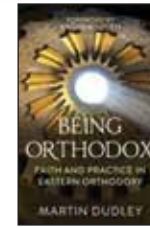
ANDREW CARR



Between The Bells
Paul Hutchinson
Canterbury Press £12.99 pbk
9781786220769

Twice a day, morning and evening, a bell sounds out over the Corrymeela Christian Centre for Reconciliation, founded in 1965 at Ballycastle, Northern Ireland. It calls those who are willing to come to the Croi, the heart of the community. Here, people of diverse backgrounds, races, religions and generations mingle before a table holding a cross, candle and open Bible, sharing stillness, noise, dancing, liturgy, music, questions and dreams. In his book, Hutchinson offers us a 'sack of tales of lives lived between the bells' – snapshots of needy individuals, groups and volunteers encountered in his former role as Centre Director, living-out together the tough realities of conflict and reconciliation. His writing is deeply poignant, wise and disturbing, full of humour and vulnerability, moving between chaos and meaningful silence. Amid the laughter and tears, however, we find Jesus hidden in the brokenness, poverty and oppression. This is a rewarding book full of people, service and spirituality, pulsing with the heartbeat of God. For more information about Corrymeela, see www.corrymeela.org

APRIL MCINTYRE



Being Orthodox
Martin Dudley
SPCK pbk £12.99
9780281082292

Sub-titled 'Faith and Practice in Eastern Orthodoxy', this book covers a wide variety of those things the author sees as so special about the beliefs, worship and traditions of the church into which he was received only a year before writing. These include its teachings concerning asceticism and fasting, repentance and confession, prayer, and icons, with descriptions of a typical church layout and of a key orthodox Holy Communion liturgy. Each topic explanation is accompanied by detailed commentaries, historical and contemporary, with extensive quotations from present or past authorities, including some from the early fathers. The author was previously an Anglican priest and one suspects that this detailed knowledge comes from many years of study rather than just one. The style is personal and impressionistic as well as painstaking and detailed, and conveys the joy and wonder that the writer is experiencing in his faith. Included is a comprehensive bibliography, an Orthodox glossary and a good index. This is a helpful introductory guide and likely to lead to further exploration by those who read it.

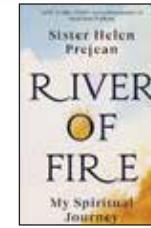
JOHN NICHOLLS



Into the Depths
Rosie Deedes
Sacristy Press pbk £12.99
9781789590326

In this book, subtitled 'A Chaplain's reflections on Death, Dying and Pastoral Care', Rosie Deedes uses experiences of her chaplaincy work in both prison and hospice to explore the ways we can help those who are troubled, or near death. Conscious always of the stresses this puts upon those who offer such pastoral care, she gives detailed tips on how carers should care for themselves; and how to beware the trap of being put on a pedestal by those you serve or work with. There is also a lot of practical advice about how to listen to others, being slow to give advice and knowing when to keep silent watch. There is good use of personal stories, and interesting and nuanced references to Jesus' own very real suffering. Deedes writes with insight and compassion, and uses biblical texts, not to provide formulaic answers to grief or suffering, but rather in emphasising the raw reality of Jesus' own fears and feelings of abandonment and pain. She also deals with the taboos surrounding death, and imprisonment. This is a thoughtful book that provides much useful advice for all those involved in caring for others.

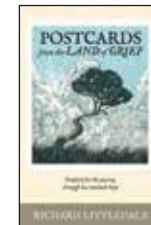
MARIE PATERSON



River of Fire
Helen Prejean
Hodder & Stoughton hbk
£16.99
9781529368314

Sister Helen's campaigns for the abolition of the death penalty in the USA first became widely known with the publication of *Dead Man Walking* which was later made into an Academy Award-winning film. In this new book the Roman Catholic nun, who joined the Congregation of St. Joseph at the age of 18, describes her spiritual journey from her original desire for a contemplative life, deepening her own spirituality, to the point at which she was 'set on fire' to become part of the movement for the establishment of human rights for each and every individual human being. It is a compelling narrative, written with great honesty and lucidity, particularly as regards her initial struggles with the reforms of Vatican II and her own need for a close human relationship in what she calls 'the territory of the heart'. Now, aged 79, she urges us all to recapture the vibrancy of the early church and embark on the great adventure of 'the river of fire', wherever it may take us in the ongoing quest for social justice and racial equality. What is God saying to the Church today and what are we being called to do?

MARGARET IVES



Postcards from the Land of Grief
Richard Littledale
Authentic Media hbk £9.99
9781788930710

The subtitle 'Comfort for the journey through loss towards hope' barely begins to describe the depths within. Personal loss has led the author to the brave step of writing an amazingly candid and poignant look into his own suffering. The book has four sections. The first portrays the author's journey up to widowhood. The third is about strengthening faith in this foreign land of grief. The fourth provides suggestions for practical help, including useful organisations and further reading. The second section, which gives the book its title, comprises 34 postcard sized entries from the first year of loss. Originally aired on the author's blog, they are beautifully and sensitively written, and contain the author's strong but quiet conviction that God is always there, whatever the suffering. This book will be an asset for anyone who has any dealings with bereaved people, in any context. And, for anyone newly bereaved who can bring themselves to dip into the postcard section, (and this is all the author expects from them), there is real potential for healing.

LIZ PACEY

5-session discussion course SUPERSTAR

“It’s 1970 – Edward Heath becomes PM, Apollo 13 limps back to earth, and Jesus Christ Superstar takes the West End by storm, asking daring questions that gave colour to my former monochrome faith and fired my vocation. Half a century on, its message remains just as relevant, and we explore themes from its iconic lyrics in the 5 sessions of this course.”

The course booklet is written by **DAVID WILBOURNE**

5 sessions:
(1) Who is Jesus?
(2) Miracles
(3) The Psalms
(4) The Church
(5) Cross purposes

Designed to minimise preparation time the course materials are suitable for inexperienced group leaders, yet versatile enough for more confident leaders to adapt to their own style. Each session has a wide choice of questions so that, wherever you are on your journey of faith, you can join in with the lively discussion!

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Lay ministries – new opportunities and resources

These are exciting times. Central Readers’ Council is launching a new website, and plans are well advanced for the first two of its blended learning modules. Ruth Haldane tells us more.

I am always encouraged when I hear about the variety of ministries Licensed Lay Ministers have in their communities, no more so than when I watched the video about LLM ministry which is on our new website www.transformingministry.co.uk. I envisage this video being used at vocational events throughout England and Wales for those who are prayerfully considering a calling to this ministry. Our thanks go to Steve Mawhinney, Riffat Zamurad, Jonny Patton and Emily Brailsford for sharing their stories of Sunday to Saturday faith as Readers/LLMs. If you haven’t watched the video yet, I urge you to do so, and to explore our new website for current Readers/Licensed Lay Ministers and those exploring this ministry as a vocation. We also have links on the website to our social media pages for Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

At various times over the last eighteen months, I have mentioned blended learning modules for continuous ministerial development, and this project is developing well. We are currently in the process of setting up our Moodle learning platform to give all Readers/LLMs access to modules on such subjects as communicating with millennials,

leadership, preaching for the everyday, focal ministry, mentoring, telling the faith story in the twenty-first century and lifelong discipleship. We have set up a direct link from our new website to the learning platform, which is a separate section for Readers/LLMs on the Church of England Moodle platform. We will be launching the first two modules on this site in April 2020.

So what do we mean by blended learning? We envisage Wardens of Readers, or those who organise continuous ministerial development, suggesting to Readers/LLMs in their diocese that everyone completes one online learning module on a specific subject over a period of, say, a couple of months. It is recommended that this is followed with a live session for all participants to gather together to discuss application and formation arising from the module. Each module will consist of around six sessions of about an hour – and more if participants want to go deeper with extra reading and listening. If some Readers/LLMs are unsure about the online learning process, perhaps they could get together in small groups to complete each session. Access to the online learning will mean logging in from the new website with a simple

password, which will be the same for all of us and published in the *Transforming Ministry* magazine (formerly *The Reader*).

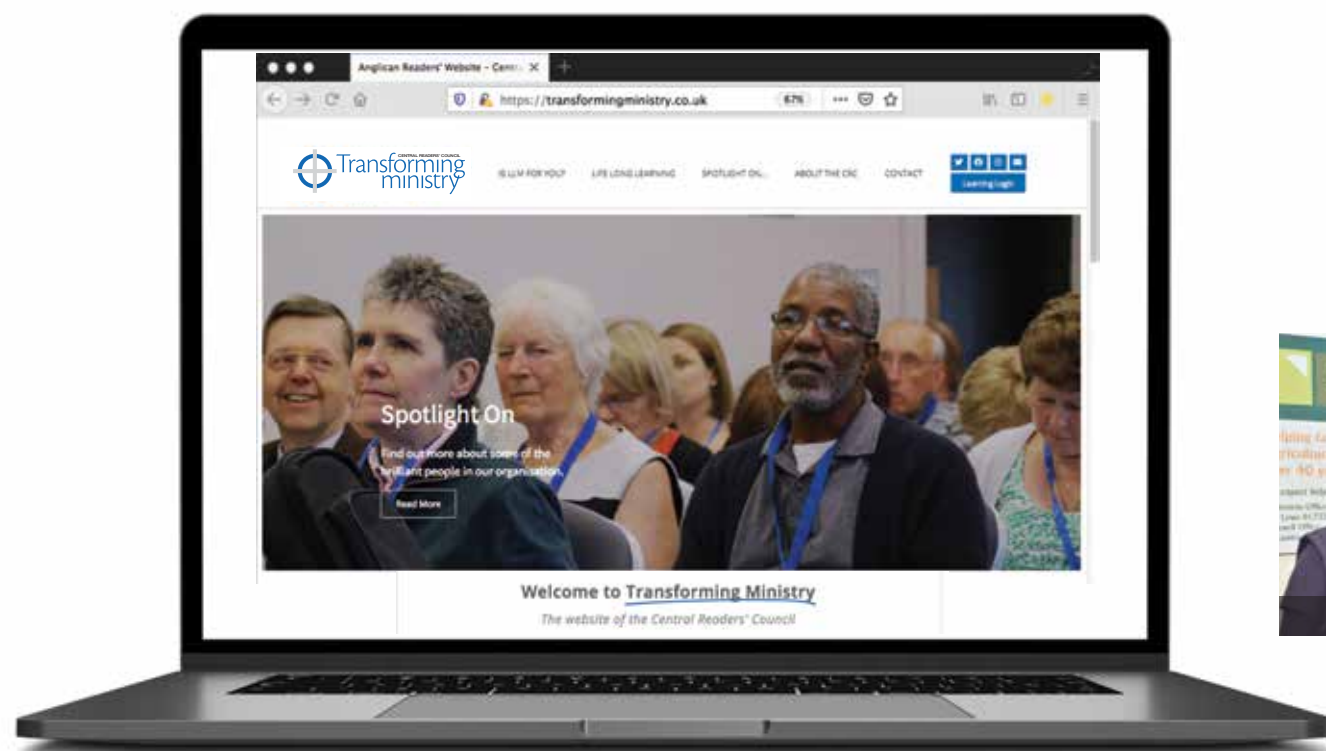
The learning platform will also give us access to back issues of *The Reader* magazine (now *Transforming Ministry*), book reviews, and ‘The Hub’ which is a large collection of articles, websites, podcasts etc. under many different subject areas. We hope that many of us as Readers/LLMs will access the learning platform and find the resources helpful and useful in our ministry.

So what’s next? Log in to the website, watch the video, link into social media, and discover the exciting things which are going on at the CRC and amongst our Readers/LLMs! We are having a launch event, and introducing our first modules, at our Transforming Ministry gathering in Birmingham on 25 April – we look forward to seeing three representatives from every diocese at this event.



Ruth Haldane is the CRC’s Reader Project Training Manager and a Reader in Blackburn Diocese.

Our new website is going live



Introducing the four Readers featured in the video on our new website:



Emily Brailsford



Steve Mawhinney



Jonny Patton



Riffat Zamurad

You will soon be able to follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter



Renewing the vision:

Challenges and opportunities from *Resourcing Sunday to Saturday Faith*

Rosemary Walters continues her series of articles suggesting practical ways of responding to Bishop Martyn's vision for the future of lay ministry

The recent booklet from CRC, *Resourcing Sunday to Saturday Faith* contains a wealth of exciting and practical ideas for living out our vocation as lay ministers, encouraging our congregations in their weekday witness and living out that witness ourselves.

Here are some thoughts from the Key Characteristics of Theme 2: *Teaching the Faith*.

Characteristic 1 (p.15):

The Christian teacher loves God and has a thorough knowledge of God's story (Scripture and tradition).

Opportunities: Study, Interpretation as if it were Shakespeare!

Challenges:

- What would you regard as a 'detailed study' of the Bible? Does your study of the Bible help you to 'see the big story'?

- How does 'tradition' and 'reason' inform your study of the Bible? Has your training or CMD given you a 'thorough study of theology'? If not, how might you rectify this?

- How far do you identify with the NT Wright invitation quoted on page 15 to see the Bible as like a Shakespeare play with the final act lost, and ministers as those who work out the final act consistently but with improvisation?

Characteristic 2 (p.16):

The Christian teacher loves people and learns how to listen well to the stories of individuals and communities (experience).

Opportunities: Deep Listening, Open Questions and New Perspectives.

Challenges:

- Do you think you have learnt the skill of 'deep listening'? How would you define this? Can you give examples of Jesus engaging in deep listening from the Gospels?

- How do you know if you have asked 'the right question'? Can you think of an example where you uncovered 'issues of concern' to the

person you are listening to and learnt from them while questioning?

- Look at the example of Jesus 'subtly shifting the question' (page 16). How does this lead to looking at people and situations from 'new perspectives'?

Characteristic 3 (p.17):

The Christian teacher loves learning and has a good understanding of how people learn (pedagogy).

Opportunities: Andragogy, Apprenticeship and Trust.

Challenges:

- In your teaching ministry do you subscribe to the theory that adults learn best through 'self-directed learning' and 'previous experience'?

- Look at the 'apprenticeship model' (p. 17). Can you think of an occasion when this has worked for you as teacher or student?

- Would you say that your preaching and teaching stimulates 'faith' and 'trust' as defined on page 17? What is the balance between the two for you?

Characteristic 4 (p.18):

The Christian teacher makes time for prayerful reflection on Scripture, experience and the process of learning (reflective practice).

Opportunities: Life-long learning, Contexts and Reflection.

Challenges:

- Do you think you would have benefited from longer training with more learning done in the context of local ministry, internet material and small tutor groups?

- Since you finished training would it be fair to say that in your ministry 'learning' has taken second place to 'doing'? If so, how might you rectify this?

- Would an 'Individual Learning Plan' (p. 19) after training and renewed regularly help you to exercise the 'habits of learning': of approaches to Bible

Study, skills for community listening and discernment and reflection on experience? Does your current Ministry Review achieve this?

Characteristic 5 (p.19):

The Christian teacher prays with imagination and creativity.

Opportunities: Formation, Creativity and Gamification.

Challenges:

- What is your definition of Christian formation? Do you find it in the description of 'the language of formation' on page 19?

- Do your Intercessions include imagination and creativity? Do you think the desirability of these qualities precludes set prayers or prayers written by someone other than yourself?

- Look at the explanation of 'gamification' on page 19. Do you see this as a dilution of or an aid to enriching prayer?

Ideas for resources

Donovan, V. (2001) *Christianity Rediscovered*. London: SCM.

Verney, S. (1985) *Water Into Wine*. London: Fount.

Grove Booklets see www.grovebooks.co.uk/evangelism

Paul, I. **B 86** *How to Interpret the Bible: Four Essential Questions*.

Bewley, R. **B 61** *Transforming Conversation: How Jesus Talked to People (Insights from Mark's Gospel)*.

Mills-Powell, M. **S 140** *Passion and Purity: Feeling, Living and Loving in the Fullness of the Image of Christ*.

Marsh, K. **S 146** *Writing Prayer Poetry: How to Deepen Your Prayer Life*.



Rosemary Walters is a Reader in the parish of St Martin and St Paul, Canterbury and a member of General Synod.

Reader badges



New Readers' badges can be ordered by writing to Central Readers' Council (Badges) Church House Great Smith Street London SW1P 3AZ

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Reader commissioned as Evangelist by Archbishop Justin Welby

Chris Andrew, co-founder of the faith-based sports organisation Project Touchline and Reader in the Gloucester Diocese is now one of fifty-nine new Archbishop's Evangelists commissioned at a special service at Lambeth Palace last October.

All fifty-nine were asked three questions:

- What can we contribute?
- Who can we call and connect?
- How can we serve?

Chris writes: 'These questions in one sense apply to my day to day work with Project Touchline but also connecting with my wider national Reader community. There could be Readers who are working as an "evangelist" and not know or recognise this fully. I was an "unexpected evangelist". They might be looking for their ministry to be affirmed and to perhaps consider joining us. They would need to be ministering across a wider boundary than their own diocese to become a member of the college and have their calling of an "evangelist" affirmed by others but I have now been through that process and can help and lead others and can recommend future members or associates of the college.'

You can find the article by Chris Andrew and John Cowan about their

sports ministry in schools in the Summer 2018 issue of *The Reader* (pages 8–9, 'Project Touchline: Playing on God's Team'). And you can find out more about his latest adventure at: <https://www.gloucester.anglican.org/2019/gloucestershire-reader-to-become-part-of-archbishops-college-of-evangelists/>



'Made by God': can you write the Sermon of the Year?

Preach magazine is launching the Sermon of the Year event for 2020. Anyone can enter, whatever their age or denomination. The youngest entrant in 2019 was 18, the oldest 87 and the winning entry was written by a Reader, Clare Masters from Rochester Diocese. You can read another article by her on page 24 of this magazine.

The Sermon of the Year aims to celebrate and encourage the craft of preaching. The theme 'Made by God' is inspired both by our original remit from God to be guardians of creation, and by the many people of faith who speak out and take action today to protect our world. The words 'Made by God' will mean different things to different preachers, and we look forward to reading the diverse and thoughtful entries.

To enter, all you have to do is write a 1,500 word sermon on the theme 'Made by God' and submit it before midnight, Sunday 23rd February 2020.

For more information, go to www.preachweb.org/sermonoftheyear

Letters from Readers

Lay ministry examined

The Winter 2019 edition with the theme of 'Lay ministry – what next?' was particularly interesting, even for a Reader over retirement age!

It is healthy in every age to review where we are going in our mission to introduce the love of God through Jesus Christ to the communities in which we are placed. A Home Group with which I am involved has been studying Ecclesiastes and has discovered how up to date it is in the way in which it explores the meaning of life, a topic for our century and troubled times just as much as the age in which the Book was written.

We have previously studied the Acts of the Apostles, which reminded us that 'Christianity is not a western religion' to use the words of Nadim Nassar in your Church Times 2019 Festival of Preaching article (page 17). This should be one factor which should allow us to be open to self-examination in the way we present our faith in our own age.

I've heard people discuss whether Jesus expected a religion to be formed by 'followers of the Way' which he was promoting as a refresher for people's relationship with God. I can identify with the idea that we have 'made ourselves into modern-day Pharisees' and that our faith should be a way of life. We may believe that there should be no division between the sacred and secular in our daily lives. After all, the culture of humans, and the restrictions they devise, has to be fundamentally flawed.

The application of a 'hierarchical "clergy-down" emphasis to ministry' tending to lead to anything 'lay' being perceived as inferior creates division which festers beneath the surface. The role of the institution is further underlined by the introduction of 'authorised' lay ministries which may also have the potential to muddy the waters.

Other LLMs have pointed to their intensified role in periods of vacancy, which most of us are happy to offer during what is potentially an anxious time for congregations. The offering of Communion by Extension is not freely

practised in public worship in my own Diocese. However, worship in a private or home situation frees us to practise what Jesus intended in the upper room when we have an opportunity to recall what he did for every one of us by his sacrifice, without necessarily an ordained presence. In that situation the 'temple curtain' has not been reinstated. Certainly there is no dilution of the solemnity in our act of remembrance.

I tend to agree with David Teall of Peterborough Diocese in his Letter in the Winter 2019 issue that some looking on from outside find difficulty in understanding the introduction of stumbling-blocks through regulation.

Graham Pharo

Reader Emeritus, Worcester Diocese

Embracing technology

I particularly enjoyed the latest issue of The Reader magazine, with its emphasis on growth and development. I heard recently of a lay person, who had the job title of 'Technology Deacon' in a particular church. It occurred to me that nobody would bother to try to trace this particular role or job title back into church history or the Bible. Christians of earlier periods would not have been able to understand the idea of such a role. By contrast, many modern churches depend on such a person in order for their worship to function at all. The world has changed, the churches have adapted to it, producing a new role and job title and hardly anyone even notices, still less objects to it. A lay ministry develops to meet a new situation and nobody minds at all.

Yet surely technological development is not the only novelty of the modern world: other lay ministries besides technology officers will need to be developed and the lack of explicit reference to them in the New Testament or the history of the church since hardly matters.

Revd Dr Andrew Coleby

Ministry Training Officer,
Peterborough Diocese

Readers as teachers

It is well known that Readers have a teaching role and indeed many are highly qualified to do this. However, it is unusual for this teaching to extend beyond exploration of faith issues in a devotional setting to providing information and enabling debate on the context and background of that faith in a wider discussion.

In the last year or so we have run three study courses in our rural parish. The first course was on the relationship between Science and Religion and was based on the Faraday Institute material *Test of Faith*. The second course was on Christian Ethics and was written by ourselves but loosely based on *Christian Ethics* by Neil Messer. The third was on the Bible and was also written by ourselves with background from *A History of the Bible* by John Barton. Each course lasted between four and six weeks and each session was carefully prepared with audio visual presentations and discussion material. We are currently preparing a fourth course based on people who have made an impact on the historical faith – Hilda, Augustine, Luther and Bonhoeffer. It is important to note that these courses are neither academic nor devotional but an attempt to convey background information and to discuss issues.

There have been two surprises. The first surprise was the numbers who attended and their enthusiasm for the courses. We had a contact list of about fifty people with about twenty attending one or more sessions of each course. The second surprise was the ignorance among participants of the background to the issues we were discussing. This particularly applied to the Bible course.

We know that there is a huge gap between the work of theologians and the understanding of those in the pew. What is odd is that so little is being done in our churches to tackle that gap. We hope that our courses go some way towards addressing the problem. Readers have an important role to play.

Roger Payne

Reader with PTO, St Albans Diocese

The power of storytelling

In response to Giles Morrison's selection of Old Testament humour, I would like to suggest that the funniest episode in the OT is within the first four verses of the book of 1 Kings – the world's first Beauty Contest. Properly told, it combines the pathos of old age with a certain sexual frisson, both staples of comedy. However, this small incident does not ooze a spiritual meaning, so it's usually overlooked.

However, it does point up the need for us, as preachers, to occasionally stray off the beaten track of expository preaching into the unknown depths of narrative preaching – in other words, telling a story, and a story in which a few details might have to be supplied by a sensitive imagination. The novelty value of a narrative sermon is usually enough to sustain more concentration from your congregation than is usual – up to the time when they give up eye contact and start looking at their feet or staring at the stained glass wondering where Sunday lunch is coming from.

My usual form of narrative preaching requires me to become someone else – the slave Onesimus, for example, or the Roman soldier at the foot of the cross. The story is then told, partly from the Scriptural detail that exists, and partly inventing the details in between. What crime did Onesimus commit, for example, and why did he run away? And how did he come to be an adopted son of Paul? And then the real issue – how and why did a small and informal letter from Paul to Philemon get to be included in the canon of Scripture? A question every preacher should ask themselves about the passage they are preparing.

Richard Brown

Reader, Chelmsford Diocese

The Editor welcomes letters for publication on this page. However, we cannot guarantee that all letters received will be published, and some will need editing for reasons of space, content overlap, etc. All opinions in these letters are those of the writers, and should not be taken as representative of the views of the Editor or Editorial Working Group.

We take this opportunity to remind writers that this is a Christian magazine and that even when we disagree, we should do so respectfully.

Deadlines for information to be included in Gazette and In Memoriam

Summer 2020 issue – Before Tuesday 28 January
Autumn 2020 issue – Before Tuesday 28 April
Winter 2020 issue – Before Tuesday 28 July
Spring 2021 issue – Before Tuesday 27 October.

Please email: gazette@cofereadermag.co.uk

Correction and apology

On page 34 of the Winter edition of *The Reader*, we featured a 'Save the Date' notice for a conference on 25 August 2020. We regret that this was an error: the conference is in fact scheduled for Saturday 25 April 2020. Many apologies for the confusion and any inconvenience caused.

The Conference will take place in Birmingham, and tickets will be allocated through Wardens of Readers.

Vacancies: CRC is looking for a trustee and a new Vice-Chair

Trustee

CRC is inviting nominations for a trustee, who would have particular responsibilities for communication between CRC and the wider world. Main responsibilities will include watching over the new Transforming Ministry website and CRC social media. Additionally, there is oversight of communicating with our members, associate members and other people or organisations that share our interest in transforming ministry. All applicants must be Readers/LLMs, or Wardens of Readers.

If you know of a suitable person, or are interested yourself, please provide the names of a proposer and a seconder and e-mail those details to crsec@btinternet.com. The nominee will also need to provide brief biographical details (no more than 200 words) that we can publish should we need to hold a ballot. Please ensure that the nominee has given his or her consent to stand as a trustee. If you require any further details, please e-mail crsec@btinternet.com.

Vice-Chair

A vacancy will arise later this year for the Vice-Chair of CRC. This role requires the individual appointed to be a Reader. The Vice-Chair is also a trustee of CRC. If you are interested or would like to nominate someone for this post, please contact either Andrew Walker, the secretary of CRC (crsec@btinternet.com) or the current Vice-Chair, Gertrud Sollars, gertrud.sollars@btinternet.com.

Gazette

OF NEWLY ADMITTED AND LICENSED READERS

Bath and Wells	Chester	Oxford
Admitted and licensed	Gaynor Bracey	Hugh Baxter
Gary Best	David Fidal	Debbie Fox
Jacqueline Chaston-Bailey	Alan Fryer	Rupert Garnett
John Hanson	Christopher Gascoigne	Chris Greaves
Angeline White	Deborah M. Moores	Julia Hunt
Christine Winter	Christine O'Neill	Shirley Northover
Annie Wynter	Karen L Wilson	Margaret Poole
	Joyce Blundell	Helen Rouse
Licensed	C. Peter Cheslett	Angeline Ruredzo
Christopher Archer	Geoffrey M. Cooke	Tim Scane
from the Diocese	Peter J. Marshall	Heather Searle
of Winchester	Joyce Shotton	Jenny Veasey
Sandra Edgerton		Graham Weller
from the Diocese of Bristol	Derby	
Lesley Edwards	Katherine (Kate) Brookbank	Portsmouth
from the Diocese	Jacqueline Haywood	Rosemary Greenlees
of Winchester	Anthony (Tony) Hill	Clare King
Michael Harrison	Roberta (Bertie) Walker	James Mant
from the Diocese of York	Brenda Silcock	Bevaly Rackett
Jayne Hinds	transferred from York	Nicola Pinnock
from the Diocese		Fi Rosen
of Norwich	Durham	Teresa-Lucia Sutton-Becker
Julie Pelling	Linda Dott	Penny Tapp
from the Diocese	Gillian Melvin	
of Birmingham		Salisbury
Blackburn	Gloucester	Justin Coldstream
Vicky Bentley	Matthew Gacek	Rachel Firth
Gregory Doughty	Peter Gee	Robert Shuler
Alan Johnson	Kathryn Lea	Judith (Judy) Wright
Aaron McLean	James Parsons	
Janet Parker	Sherri Taylor	Truro
Gail Whittaker	Helen Oldham	Martin Adams
Michael Whittaker	transferred from Chester	Lesley Boyden
		Kim Dooley
Bristol	Newcastle	Henry Gompertz
Debra Chaffey	Timothy Burdon	Deborah (Debbie) Harris
Julia Childerhouse	Jane Clark	Elizabeth Lane
Christine Dursley	James Feeley	Robin West
Pauline Loveday	Elizabeth Hawkins	James Wonnacott
Angela Mak	Shirley Morgan	
Kevin Penfold	Melanie Wilkinson	
Valerie Slade	Helen Wright	
Simon Williams		

†
In Memoriam

Bath and Wells
Katherine Lovegrove
Birmingham
Dorothy Ward
Blackburn
Tony Guenault
William (Bill) Phelps
Chelmsford
Rosemond Isiodu
Chester
Colin Eastwood
Bill Garrett
Chichester
John Gooch
Durham
Clifton Stockdale
Leeds
David Collingwood
Norwich
Catherine (Kate) Bevis
Clifford Self
Oxford
Mary Knight
Portsmouth
Margaret Cantrill
Hilary Davis
Pamela Dunstan
Rochester
Anne Pilgrim
Pat Read
Southwell and Nottingham
Grenville Gibson
Monmouth
Stanley Smith

MAY THEY REST IN PEACE AND RISE IN GLORY

Postscript – Walking with the wounded

There is much wisdom in this issue of *Transforming Ministry*. The theme, ‘Walking with the wounded’, was chosen long before we made the decision to rename our magazine, yet it seems so appropriate. Bishop Martyn in his article on page five reminds us that the lay minister is often to be found at the crucial junction between faith and the realities of pain in daily life. Good pastoral care is indeed a transforming ministry.

The new title for the magazine is of course a play on words. And ‘walking with the wounded’ is as good example as any of how the Church’s ministry is itself being transformed as increasingly we recognise and value the complementarity of lay and ordained ministers working together in pastoral teams. Lay ministers are often curiously privileged as they are perceived as more approachable by members of congregations and indeed those who have no relationship at all with a church. The ministry of *Everyman*.

So who are the ‘wounded’ that we are called to walk with? It’s good to see that many churches are increasingly aware of, and sensitive to, the needs of those with invisible disabilities. Yes, we know we need to provide ramps for those in wheelchairs, large-print service booklets for those with ageing sight and a hearing loop for the deaf. Perhaps the bigger challenge is how we walk alongside those with more hidden challenges – anxiety, depression, bereavement, loneliness, addiction, abuse, miscarriage, childlessness. I was moved recently after a *Godly Play* session when a man in his fifties came up and said how refreshing it was to be greeted not with a prayer book, a Bible and a notice sheet, but simply an invitation to look and listen to a story. Our conversation unpacked his dyslexia, undiagnosed in childhood, a challenge he has wrestled with throughout his life. Oh, so many words in our churches! Is there a place for ‘songs without words’ in your church’s music ministry or healing ministry?

And what of ourselves? Who cares for the minister offering this costly ministry of ‘walking with the wounded’? Henri Nouwen wrote a beautiful little book called *The Wounded Healer*. He reminds us that of course we are all wounded. While seeking to care for others, the healer must at the same time carry her own pain and darkness. Some of us carry our wounds better than others; some of us allow others to share the load; some of us even dare to receive healing from the wounded.

One of Graham Kendrick’s most poignant songs is ‘Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair’, written for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the relief agency, Tear Fund. But Nouwen takes us further and paints a picture of beauty in brokenness. To be wounded is part of our common humanity and yet we are never alone ‘walking with the wounded’ if we walk in the presence of the wounded Christ. Indeed the crucifixion is the ultimate ‘transforming ministry’. The broken body of Jesus on the cross is the place, ultimately perhaps the only place, where we will find healing and wholeness, ‘. . . by his wounds you have been healed’, 1 Peter 2.24.



Alan Mitchell



Henri Nouwen’s *The Wounded Healer* is published by DLT. A new compilation of his writings, *Following Jesus*, published by SPCK, is reviewed on page 29 of this issue of *Transforming Ministry*.



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