

# Pathways

The magazine for the people of the Diocese of Oxford | Summer 2025 | **FREE**

## Change-makers

*How volunteers are making a difference*

**PLUS:** How to be a school governor | Faith in AI? | Life-changing travel



One body, many gifts

Our new priests go into the world to extend the kingdom of God, a cause of much rejoicing. Yet every one of us has a part to play in building God’s kingdom.

It is often said we are all different and we all have our strengths. Do you wonder why? It is by God’s design that each of us has unique gifts, skills and talents to share.

Whether you choose to serve your church or your wider community, know that you are doing God’s work. God’s generous gifts to us are given so that we might put them to good use, to glorify him and show the world the grace of God’s love.

As Christians we are called to be disciples for the Lord, just as the apostles were pressed into service to spread the good news of Jesus’ resurrection and the good works he did during his life on earth.

Your act of kindness, however small, could be the difference in one person’s life to know God’s love and to make that change to follow him.

Your views on Pathways

Pathways is one of our core publications, and in the autumn we will be asking for your views on how we can make sure it is still valued, and in what format it is most useful. Please look out for the survey.

In this edition

We shine a spotlight on the countless volunteers who reach out into their communities to demonstrate God’s love for them. Some of the examples of this include “How to be a school governor” (page 8).

In our opinion column (page 12) we take a close look at AI and its impact on churches. The Revd Rickey Simpson-Gray, his wife Nicki Simpson-Gray of Wokingham parish and the Revd Simon Cross, AI specialist, discuss the pitfalls and possible benefits of the technology.

Archdeacon of Dorchester the Ven David Tyler shares his experience of travel and its impact on faith (page 18).

If you’re feeling inspired, “Be a changemaker” (page 17) features three people who live up to our diocesan values to be contemplative, compassionate and courageous in the work they do to serve others.

I hope this edition of Pathways encourages you in the work you do to support your community and the difference we can all make with the gifts we are given.

*Steven Oxford*

Bishop Steven  
[oxford.anglican.org/bishop-of-oxford](https://oxford.anglican.org/bishop-of-oxford)

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We hope you enjoy reading Pathways. Email or write and let us know what you think. Contributor enquiries are welcome.

Pathways is published three times a year by the Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance. To receive the magazine regularly, or to order bundles for your church, please get in touch.

To get in touch with Pathways email us at [communications@oxford.anglican.org](mailto:communications@oxford.anglican.org) or write to Pathways Magazine, Church House Oxford, Langford Locks, Kidlington, OX5 1GF

UK registered charity number 247954

ISSN 2632-0401



Pathways is printed locally in Oxford by Holywell Press using sustainable uncoated paper. When you’re done, cut it up for the church notice board, use it for children’s group activities or pop it in the recycling bin.

Typeset by Holywell Press.

Cover photo: Simon Smith, photo on page 22: LoggaWiggler/Pixabay. Words and photographs © Diocese of Oxford 2025, unless otherwise indicated.



Friends of Holywell Cemetery

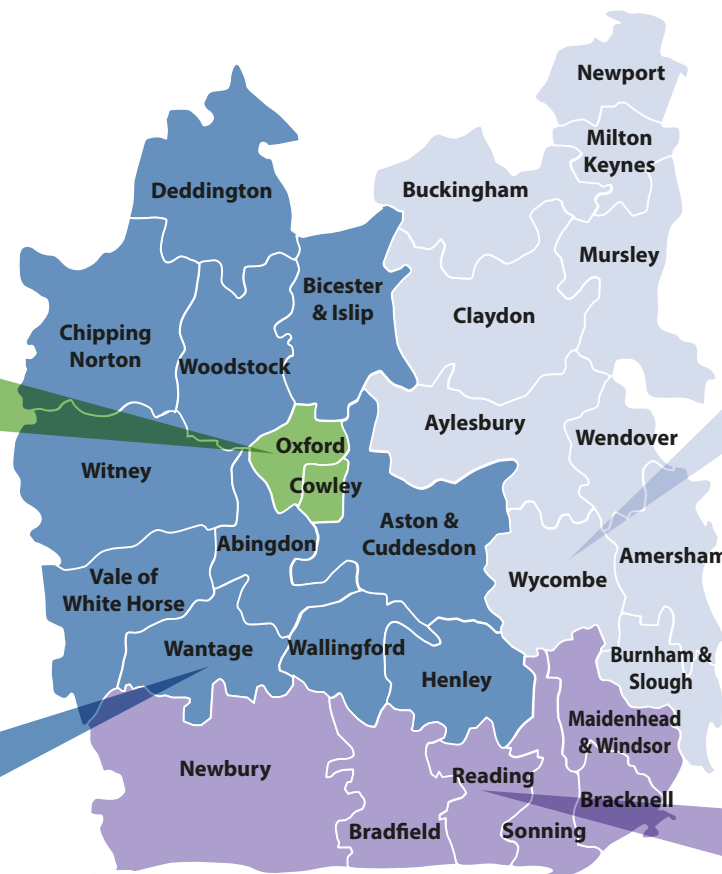


## Volunteers create city-centre haven

A team of volunteers who turned a “secret” cemetery in Oxford city centre into a nature haven were recognised with an award. The Friends of Holywell Cemetery worked together to preserve the site, balancing the biodiversity needs of the wildlife there. The work earned the team an Oxford Preservation Trust Award and has seen more than 100 distinct species make the cemetery home.

[oxford.anglican.org/award-winning-restoration](https://oxford.anglican.org/award-winning-restoration)

For regular news and updates, visit the website:  
[oxford.anglican.org/news](https://oxford.anglican.org/news)



Beka Sharrock

## Sharing fun, faith and food

More than 200 young people gathered for a weekend of fun and fellowship at the second annual Wycombe Youth Weekender. The event runs thanks to the support of a Development Fund grant, as well as a team of youth leaders and volunteers. The young people took part in worship and workshop sessions which covered topics like mental wellbeing, sin, and asking big questions.

[oxford.anglican.org/hundreds-of-young-people](https://oxford.anglican.org/hundreds-of-young-people)

The Revd Mike Griffiths



## Bringing the community together

There were pints in the pews as St Peter and St Paul’s Church in Wantage produced their first-ever parish ale – DisciPlAle. The brew, made locally by Chaddleworth’s Indigenous Brewery to a distinct recipe, has been made for both Wantage parish and the West Downland benefice. Volunteers helped serve the beer at a traditional Whitsun festival-fundraiser at the church.

[oxford.anglican.org/cheers-church](https://oxford.anglican.org/cheers-church)

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St John’s, Woodley

## Welcoming young families to church

The first church of its kind has opened in Woodley, with the aim of attracting more young families to attend. Bubble Church follows the pattern of a traditional church service done in a way that is more accessible for young children, including the telling of a Bible story using puppets. The Vicar, the Revd Mark Nam, hopes the service will “show people what church is all about”.

[oxford.anglican.org/bubble-church](https://oxford.anglican.org/bubble-church)

# Joy Abel

**Joy Abel** is a former nurse who volunteers at Reading Coroner's Court, providing pastoral support at inquests.

Sadness, anger, family feuds... these are just some of the things Joy faces as she supports families, friends and witnesses who have to attend an inquest. She begins by trying to set them at ease. There's practical information about court procedures to be shared, toilets to be signposted and the offer of a cup of coffee.

She might be with a suited professional or a homeless person, yet Joy is always aware that she is dealing with a whole person – body, mind and spirit.

This way of seeing people takes Joy back to when she trained as a nurse in the 60s. Matron would reprimand nurses who saw people in terms of their condition: "Nobody is an appendix in bed 6."

I am surprised to hear that in those days a hospital shift at the Royal London Hospital began with nurses saying the Lord's Prayer.

Today, Joy values the work her fellow volunteers do, whether they are Christians or not, but she reflects that "I'm never alone in what I do... I have the strength of the Lord with me as I am working." She prays to be given the right words – or for God to keep her mouth shut if that is what's needed. She can't take away what has happened in the past, but she can walk alongside those who seek her support. At the end of each day she offers her notes to God in prayer.

As we chat, we keep returning to the difference it makes seeing people as body, mind and spirit. When she volunteered as a Street Pastor Joy

knew "Nobody is just a drunk on a street". But there was a price to pay for that work. The answer to "What makes you want to be a Street Pastor?" was not "Because I love working with drunk people!"

***"I'm never alone in what I do"***

There have been other challenges for Joy as a Christian. About ten years ago she was part of an ecumenical church project which was slowly dying. Repeated visits to the Abbey Centre on the Scottish island of Iona gave her faith a boost, but she kept getting dispirited when returning home. Joy eventually walked away from the project, thinking she was close to losing her faith. She then discovered St Barnabas, Emmer Green. "It blew my mind and gave me the 'kick up the bum' I needed."

Today she continues to get the spiritual support she needs at St Barnabas. Each week the church will pray for people's needs at various services and by an email prayer chain of about 20 people. When a close family member had a serious diagnosis, Joy and her husband were aware of being held by others in prayer.

Joy's work has been recognised outside church circles. She received the High Sheriff's Award for Volunteer Services for "your part in enhancing the lives of the community". Yet Joy sees her work in this way: "I'm given gifts by God, and I want to use them."

Words: Ruth Hamilton-Jones

Photo: Emma Thompson

# Be a school governor

**Sue Hunter** is a governor of Wantage Church of England Primary School. She describes a role which combines helping the next generation thrive with developing board-level experience.

"Have you ever thought about becoming a school governor?"

My friend had spotted an advert and thought I might be interested. The truthful answer was that I had never thought about being a governor and, in spite of a career in education, I had only a hazy idea of what school governors do. My interest was piqued, and a bit of research told me that being a governor would be a varied and interesting role. More than a decade and four schools later, I still find it fulfilling.

So what do governors do? To quote the diocesan website, "Governors provide critical strategic leadership for school communities leading to high aspirations for children and young people." The role is strategic rather than operational, setting the vision and monitoring progress towards it. In practice this reflects a myriad of different areas and requires a team with a wide range of skills and experience. As a teacher, I already had experience of areas such as safeguarding and educational theory but being a governor has given me insight into facets of school life about which I knew less, from finance and risk to HR and publicity. Fortunately, there is a wealth of learning resources to draw on and broadening my experience has been one of the benefits of the role. Then there are the people – school staff, families, co-governors and especially the children – who make the role enjoyable and worthwhile.

The schools I have served have all been church schools and there is something rather special about the theologically-based ethos of these schools. In a church school the Christian faith explicitly underpins a deep commitment to serving the whole community, welcoming pupils from all backgrounds and ensuring that they experience "life in abundance" (John 10.10). One annual highlight for me is an invitation to the extraordinarily moving Passion Play, written and performed each year by Year 5 pupils from Wantage CE Primary. I never cease to be amazed by the insight and thoughtfulness of such young children as they tell the story of Holy Week through their poetry and mime.

Governors often find themselves invited to take part in all sorts of wonderful things that don't appear in the job description. Over the years I have helped run a bar at the school fete, handed out awards, judged competitions (a minefield!), attended numerous plays, sporting events, science fairs and art exhibitions, supervised a super-confident group of Year 5s interviewing prospective new vicars, and so much more. Never a dull moment! 📖

*Photos: Wantage Church of England Primary School*

For more about this vital role contact [tracy.makin@oxford.anglican.org](mailto:tracy.makin@oxford.anglican.org) or visit [governorsforschools.org.uk](http://governorsforschools.org.uk)



# Loving your neighbour

Jesus famously said that loving your neighbour as yourself is the most important commandment after the commandment to love God (Matthew 22.39). **Julia Ogilvy** shares one way to do that.

Every Friday at 12 noon for the last five years a group of people from the village of Fawley and the surrounding area, plus dogs (and occasionally horses) have gathered in the churchyard for a short prayer service. It began on 27 March 2020 in response to the pandemic. The service has a spiritual theme and includes a mix of poetry, readings from various faith traditions and prayers, particularly for individuals.

The prayers now get sent out across the world and the community has grown from a group of ten of us to more than 130 people who attend at various times or read the prayers at home. Many would probably describe themselves as, "spiritual but not particularly religious".

I have often been asked how the service began. It started with an email from our churchwarden who was looking for a volunteer to lead prayers in our church during the lockdown, with other villages doing the same. I believe it was the Spirit that called me as my response was immediate.

A few days later churches were closed but I could not reconcile that with my faith, which told me communal prayer was more important than ever. As Jesus said, "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." (Matthew 18.20, NIV). So we began, standing six feet apart

across the churchyard, providing comfort and reassurance to many people and demonstrating a way to love our neighbours. Gradually more people became involved, volunteering to lead prayers, do readings and occasionally bake or bring flowers on special occasions. A new community was born and, to this day, meets outside in almost any weather.

**"A new community was born"**

I will always remember the moment when I asked a new friend about his faith and he responded simply, "I am a follower of Christ". Those words struck me very powerfully and I started to think of my faith in those terms and to think about what Jesus would do in any situation. His greatest teachings are about love and, above all, about loving our neighbour, whoever they are.

I know that our Friday prayer community gives a sense of our interconnectedness, both as humans and also as part of the natural world. We can reflect on the challenges in our daily lives, pray for peace and for better leaders, long for more kindness, provide a community for the bereaved and, in a small way, we are doing our best to bring the teachings of Jesus to life and to bring our church back to the heart of the community. 🙏

*Julia Ogilvy worships at St Mary the Virgin, Fawley.*



We belong to a global community too. Discover ways in which as a diocese we reach across the world to support, and be supported, by our global neighbours: [oxford.anglican.org/diocesan-links](https://oxford.anglican.org/diocesan-links)

# Can we have faith in AI?



**The Revd Dr Simon Cross** is the Bishop of Oxford's Advisor for Parliamentary Affairs, specialising in AI and technology with the Church of England's Faith and Public Life Team.

**SC:** My role has been to explore and develop some practical and spiritual guidance around different kinds of technology, but for obvious reasons that's mostly been AI. Part of that work has been helping the bishops who are in the House of Lords with government policy and specific bits of regulation, like the Online Safety Act and the Data Use Bill.

The second part of my role is helping ordinary churchgoers to understand the strengths and benefits of these kinds of technologies and also some of the risks, weaknesses and hidden aspects of them.

**NSG:** I specialise in working creatively bringing music, movements, all sorts of virtual reality into my practice. I'm autistic as well, so I use AI to find alternative ways of saying things which I wouldn't normally say.

**RSG:** Sometimes I start with personal reflections from a Bible study. Then I ask if AI can broaden that out or put that in language

for my youth group to relate to, if I'm having a discussion with them. So it's augmenting what I put in there. The human element of me goes in there, AI does the work, and I then refine it. Recently, I had a vision day at church. Out of it came 106 strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. It was important to listen to all of these points. In my report to the PCC, I asked AI to summarise it in six bullet points. It

started the process and I used it to create a set of values. Out of that came a mission statement and an action plan.

**NSG:** I don't think there's enough guidance out there that encourages conversations about AI. We need to say it's OK to be very, very fearful. That fear is well placed because what we do is so important. The repercussions can be life-changing if we get things wrong.

**SC:** I think that with this technology there's a really interesting, but quite difficult, boundary somewhere between where AI is augmenting us and the work that we're trying to

*"AI does the work and I can then refine it."*

In each edition of *Pathways*, we ask two Christians to discuss a topical issue. This time we bring together an AI expert and two professionals with deeply pastoral roles who are slowly bringing these digital tools into their day-to-day work. Can AI be a force for good in churches?

accomplish, and where it actually begins to undermine us. The biggest take-away I can give to anybody who is wrestling with the benefits and risks of this kind of technology is just to understand that it doesn't know what the real world is. It has no idea of what truth or a lie is. So the onus is on us every single time to make absolutely sure that we have checked the facts in what we are using.

**NSG:** It takes experience, knowledge and training to be able to use technology well within a therapeutic relationship. It's far more than just plugging into a certain number of apps and sitting in front of a screen and thinking it's like-for-like. The tools are only as good as the person using them.

There are certain elements of my job where I need to stay engaged with clients for who they are individually rather than automating what I can.

**SC:** You've got to understand that balance. A chatbot can never provide the empathy that a human being can.

*"... it actually begins to undermine us."*

**RSG:** Becoming very good at bringing that empathy across using technology is a skill that you can only develop through the proper training. Through the use of your voice, the use of your gestures, the full interaction that, even though you're using technology, make it very human.

**NSG:** The apps that I use as tools within my practice are carefully curated and chosen by me.

We don't have things listening in. We don't accept cookies.

**SC:** We should also be aware there are (hidden) human decisions and priorities veiled behind and embedded in how the tech actually works. Priorities that corral and manipulate us.

Added to that, large language models are like a hall of mirrors. They're actually reflecting ourselves back to us, but they're doing it in all kinds of ways that are slightly distorted. If we're not careful and we just see ourselves in our interactions with these things, I think we end up with quite a



**The Revd Rickey Simpson-Gray** is the vicar at Wokingham St Sebastian, with a background in banking and government. His wife **Nicki** is a psychotherapist who started her practice online during the Covid lockdowns and works as a cyber therapist today.

distorted self-image about who we are, what we are.

But, interestingly, I think one of the ways these tools are useful is that they seem to be really good for people who are neurodivergent.

What would you like from the Church of England, from the Diocese of Oxford, in terms of guidance?

**RSG:** A space for clergy to experiment in a safe environment, whether it's creating images or helping with PCC minutes or extensive deep research. I'd say help with allowing the technology to help us to be more creative, to help us to reach those parts of our communities which are marginalised, those who are on the

edges, who are hard to reach. This is particularly important for the younger generation, showing that we can speak their language and understand the ways that they see their lives and the world. We could use that to lead them to a very personalised experience of Jesus. I think that's at the heart of what I'd love to see.

**SC:** It's challenging because there's a part of all of us that would really like hard and fast guidelines, a clear line in the sand. But we are talking about that very grey, murky, wiggly boundary between augment and undermine. And that's quite difficult. ¶

*This article is a selected portion of the conversation and has been edited for clarity.*

## Further reading

### **Artificial Intelligence: A Guide for the Perplexed** by Simon Cross (Grove Books)

Artificial intelligence (so called) is portrayed alternately as the solution to all our ills and the thing that will bring our final demise as a species. But what exactly is it, and what questions does it raise, not only about our use of it as a tool, but also about what it means to be human?

This compelling and engaging study locates the discussion in the context of a Christian understanding of what it means to be human, and the importance of language. It sets out the key issues we must consider in evaluating AI, for good and for ill.

### **Empire of AI** by Karen Hao

When longtime AI expert and journalist Karen Hao first began covering OpenAI in 2019, she thought they were the good guys. Founded as a nonprofit with safety enshrined as its core mission, its leader Sam Altman told us it was meant to act as a check against market forces.

But the core truth of this massively disruptive sector is that it requires an unprecedented amount of proprietary resources: the "compute" power of scarce high-end chips, the sheer volume of data that needs to be amassed at scale, the humans on the ground "cleaning it up" for sweatshop wages throughout the Global

South, and a truly alarming spike in the need for energy and water underlying everything. We have entered a new, ominous age of empire with OpenAI setting a breakneck pace as a small group of the most valuable companies in human history try to chase it down.

With unparalleled access to those closest to Sam Altman, Hao recounts the meteoric rise of OpenAI and shows us the sinister impact that this industry is having on society.

### **Made in our Image: God, artificial intelligence and you** by Stephen Driscoll

Artificial intelligence is coming. No life will be left untouched. What does Christianity have to say about this brave new world? What will living for Jesus look like in a world where humans, made in God's image, coexist with intelligent machines made in our image?

Author, pastor and self-confessed "tech realist" Stephen Driscoll answers these questions with a deep dive into the intersection of faith and technology. Avoiding the extremes of both the tech-worshippers and the "doomers", Driscoll offers accessible and illuminating insights into the nature of AI, along with practical tips on how Christians might use this technology for good. Most of all, he shows how the deepest structures of biblical thought will equip Christians to live with AI.

# Change-makers

How does volunteering look in our churches?  
We explore how countless change-makers are helping to shape our communities through their commitment to serving the church.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that our churches could not carry out the breadth and variety of work, outreach activities and community support they do without the support of an army of volunteers. Indeed, according to the Church of England, volunteers "devote over 23 million hours across the country to community action over and above their normal church activities."

And it's not just community action – the very nuts and bolts of our churches simply would not work without the generosity of countless volunteers giving up their time each week. From gardeners keeping churchyards tidy to organisers bringing people together for a weekly Bible study, or the welcoming team on hand to greet churchgoers every Sunday – we all make up the body of Christ. Many of these volunteers are carrying out roles which support the very fabric of our churches, and without which many churches would undoubtedly have to close for lack of maintenance.

## Biblical inspiration

For any vicar preparing a sermon on using God's gifts in his service there are several Bible verses which can be drawn upon to offer inspiration. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus commissioned his followers to serve one another with humility and love, to live out God's love as his disciples. In 1 Peter 4.10 we are called to use our gifts to serve others: "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." There is no question whether we have a gift, only the way we decide to use it.

## Swimming against the tide

Against a national backdrop of volunteering in decline, our acts of kindness become an important witness to the world. Christians are called to live life against the tide, swimming in our own direction to make sometimes difficult choices in following Jesus' example. So many of us are standing and being counted when called upon, whether that's service "inside the walls" in church, or "outside the walls" in community-based endeavours.

## The current challenges

That said, recruiting volunteers to serve, especially in our churches, is a challenge many clergy face. An ageing congregation, a rise in both parents working, retirement coming later in life and a hangover from Covid are just some of the reasons a churchwarden post may go unfilled for some years. Another reason is that the post itself is demanding and time-consuming.

Perhaps Christian “volunteering” would benefit from a rebranding. We are called to serve, rather than volunteer, not to give something back to our community but to show the love of God through our own deeds, sharing the gifts we have been given by the goodness of God’s grace. Therefore, if we call upon our church members to live out their baptismal promises to serve all of God’s people, we are making disciples of them rather than volunteers.

## The benefits of serving

In answer to that call, our congregations will come to know the many benefits of “volunteering” or serving others. What better way to get to know a new church and the people it serves than getting involved in its community work? For many, of course, serving others has a positive impact on their own circumstances too. A boost in mental health, a deeper relationship with God and the simple pleasure of the company of others.

## Being open to changes

Yet, this compulsion to Christian service for the sake of others does not come without risk. It is important to recognise a church community in fatigue which needs support rather than another appeal for help. Those who step forward could be encouraged to make a role their own, understanding it is not necessary for all things to remain the same, and church leaders and congregations could be encouraged to recognise when a project or activity has come to its natural end and to accept that outcome.

Our capacity and motivation to serve the Lord may ebb and flow as the seasons of our life do, but we should remember that living out our life in the way Jesus taught us is an act of service in itself. 🙏

*Photo: St Peter's, Aylesbury*

# Be a change-maker

## Be contemplative

Being a Licensed Lay Minister doesn't feel like I've started to do something for the church; I've just continued the thing I was always doing. I often see myself as a bit of a Swiss Army Knife. I'm not an expert in anything but there are a lot of different things I can do. If you need someone who can fill the gap and make something happen where it needs to happen, I can do that.

For me being contemplative in my service is serving God through all that I do. As a church we should be praying for each other's ministry in our workplaces, and understanding that our day jobs are also serving God.

I felt that, from a very young age, you are meant to be giving as well as receiving as part of the community. I always believed that Christianity was an active thing. To be radical, Jesus had to be engaged in what he believed in, otherwise, what's the belief for? If you're going to serve God, you've got to go out and do something.

It's about doing what you believe you're made to do.

*Alex Rees, LLM, St Mary's, Princes Risborough*

## Be courageous

I believe everyone should be actively involved in their church if they are able; there are so many ways to serve, and something for every kind of gift and personality. Being willing to speak up and offer to help can take courage, whether it's up front or behind the scenes, but together it helps us to build the body of Christ, and both individuals and the whole church will benefit enormously.

I am the parish safeguarding officer (PSO). It can be a demanding role, but it is one I am able to do with the help of the team around me, using my experience from having been a teacher and youth worker. Safeguarding draws on my love for young people, but also on my practical side – I enjoy keeping things on track and helping others in the church understand why it matters.

The real courage in my job is not my own, but that shown by the victims and survivors of abuse, and those around them who speak up when they see that something isn't quite right. It is a privilege to be able to provide support to keep our young people and vulnerable adults safe.

*Claire Lawrence, PSO, Ruscombe and Twyford*

## Be compassionate

In our culture you don't talk about things, you don't fuss, you are supposed to “get over it”. People are embarrassed by grief. They don't know what to do about it. They feel sorry but they don't know how to express that. I'm really pleased we're doing something for people to know there's a place they can talk and there are people to listen.

Listening is the most important thing we can do for anybody. That's why the bereavement café appealed to me in the first place. Anyone who follows Jesus is someone who wants to be useful to others, and at different times in our lives we are in a position to do things or not.

Our experience has been that the people who come love it, and come back and bring other people in.

We want to show compassion to the whole community, not just those within the church. This café starts conversations about all kinds of things, where we can really show God's love to others.

*Jenifer Wates, bereavement café volunteer, St Mary Magdalene, Woodstock*



# Life-changing travel

Not every archdeacon helps to lead a team of young people camping. The **Ven David Tyler** explains why it was important for him to share the Taizé experience with the next generation.

Taizé is a place that changed my life for the better for ever.

Nestled in the Burgundy countryside, this ecumenical community was originally set up in 1940 by Brother Roger, a Swiss Christian who cycled from his home in Geneva. He began by offering shelter to those fleeing Nazi persecution, including political and Jewish refugees. In 1949 Brother Roger set up a community for both Catholic and Protestant brothers, and over the years the community has grown to over 100 brothers, drawn from over 30 countries. Each year the community welcomes tens of thousands of young pilgrims who will spend a week camping (or in dormitories) with very basic food, experiencing a monastic pattern of Christian life.

Many people have encountered the world-famous Taizé chants, which form an essential part of the pattern of daily prayer which is integral to this community. You hear many languages spoken in worship, and also in the small discussion groups, or while doing the daily chores which are asked of everyone who visits.

At the end of the day, many gather at Oyak, the onsite café, to have a drink, to chat and to join in with spontaneous singing (often led by the Italian groups). Through the rhythm and peace of Taizé, many friendships are formed, and I am still in contact with German, Italian, Dutch and Spanish friends from my last visit.

In many ways, Taizé is completely different from anything you might experience elsewhere. You can read about it or watch videos about it, but until you experience it (and until you experience the worship at Taizé) you won't fully understand what it is all about and why it is so appealing.

Taizé changed my life when I visited with a group from Hull University. I found a fresh and enriching pattern to life and a place that saw my faith strengthen and grow. I found a "thin place" where God was clearly present. I visited Taizé three times as a student and also went on a (very cold) trip to Wrocław in Poland for a Taizé European Meeting in January, travelling by coach through what was Eastern Germany. It was some 30 years before I returned, on the trip from our diocese in 2023, the year I became Archdeacon.

This year I am returning to Taizé from 16-24 August as we lead a joint trip with the Diocese of Guildford for our young people. I am excited to be going and to see how God may act, especially in the lives of the young people coming. My life was transformed at Taizé. It strengthened my faith as a young person, a faith that has sustained and enriched my life and seen me called to ordination.

Please consider committing to pray for our trip. We are expectant that lives will be changed in this small village in France. 🙏

*Photo: Tamino Petelinšek, copyright © Ateliers et Presses de Taizé, 71250 Taizé, France*

*"Taizé is completely different..."*



Although the Taizé Community is particularly popular with young pilgrims, the brothers also welcome families and adults: [taize.fr/en](https://taize.fr/en)

# Dwelling in the Word

These Bible passages have spoken, and continue to speak, to Kay Bradley. When she was longing to respond to God's call, at times when she is overburdened, and as a constant inspiration, these are the verses that have come alive for her.

Then the Lord called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!"<sup>5</sup> and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. <sup>6</sup>The Lord called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." <sup>7</sup>Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. <sup>8</sup>The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. <sup>9</sup>Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'"

## 1 Samuel 3.4-9

He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. <sup>32</sup>And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.

## Mark 6.31-32

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, <sup>17</sup>and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. <sup>18</sup>I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup>and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

<sup>20</sup>Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, <sup>21</sup>to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Ephesians 3.16-21

These verses are from the New Revised Standard version of the Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Kay Bradley is an Anna Chaplain – dedicated to the spiritual care of older people – for the four parishes in the Lenborough benefice. She's also a churchwarden in Padbury. She explains the connection between the Bible passages opposite and what she does day to day.

Covid and lockdown, frustrating as those times were, made me appreciate the joy of peace and quiet. Throughout lockdown, our vicar led the church online. A weekly meditation was livestreamed. It was amazing. I couldn't get enough of it! But let's go back a moment...

I have attended church services all my life. When we were children, there was nothing else to do on Sundays – no shopping, television or car. The Zoom meetings and my reflections made me realise the scale of my ignorance about the Bible. For over 75 years I heard Bible passages read in church. I could have told you most of Jesus' miracles, but otherwise my knowledge was shallow. My late husband was an architect and probably I knew more about quinquennials (five-yearly church building inspections) than I did about the Bible!

I had the opportunity to think about what I had taken for granted for so long. Why hadn't I realised what an incredible tool the Bible is?

I tend to learn by doing. What could I do? I was too old for ordination, but I kept seeing mention of Anna Chaplains, there for people who have lived longer and are of strong, little or no faith – in other words, every older person.

After much research and my own simple way of praying, more and more I found the verses of 1 Samuel resonating with me. "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." Samuel didn't know who was calling or what was expected of him but his and Eli's faith were enough for him to say yes.

I really felt that God was pointing me towards Anna Chaplain ministry, and many times since I made the momentous decision to train as an Anna Chaplain, I have been strengthened by these words.

When confronted with seemingly unsolvable problems, I get that feeling that God must be telling me to do something that leads into unfamiliar territory – in these times especially, the verses give me strength to accept the challenge.

This year there was a vacancy for a vicar in our benefice. On the plus side it gave me opportunities that I never thought I would have. However, sometimes it all seemed a bit overwhelming. Jesus recognised the need for rest, so when I think, "I can't do this anymore," I turn to Mark 6.31-32. The disciples needed peace and quiet, but are faced with a multitude of people reliant on them for help. I read Jesus' words "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." My quiet place is a candlelit room, there just for me and my thoughts.

Ephesians 3.16-21 sums up the reason I do what I do. At times it is hard to focus, the road ahead full of potholes and there seem to be rules and regulations about everything, but I feel privileged to be part of a wonderful church family where I am "rooted and grounded in love".



Find out more about Anna Chaplains:  
[annachaplaincy.org.uk](http://annachaplaincy.org.uk)

## Lord, help us...

Lord, help us...

When on the busy hamster wheel of life,  
Frazzled and frenzied, exhausted from strife;  
Lead us to calm waters, so we can flow freely.  
*Your yoke is easy, your burden is light.*

Lord, help us...

When a day is like living in blackest night  
The vicious blows too many to fight  
We fall, we crawl, in hopeless plight  
Comfort us, carry us, lift up our eyes.  
*Renew our strength; on wings we will rise*

Lord, help us...

When we just don't know where to go next,  
Stuck at the crossroads, which direction to step?  
When each way forward seems blocked  
Guide our feet through the maze,  
*Reveal your ancient paths, show us the good ways.*

Lord, help us...

When the task asked seems too tough  
We feel unqualified, unworthy, not good enough.  
Let us see with your mirror, as you formed us to be.  
*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*

Prayer: Chloe Hope

Bible sources: Matthew 11.30; Isaiah 40.31; Jeremiah 6.16; Psalm 139.13; Philippians 4.13.

# Max McLean told me...



For Charlie, finding God quite literally saved his life. It was at his lowest point that Charlie decided to give his life to God, and trust in him.

One night, unable to sleep, Charlie turned on the radio and found Max

McLean's show where he was reading aloud the Psalms. Awestruck, all Charlie could do was keep listening. Through verses of rejoicing and anguish, he was transfixed, until he eventually fell asleep. From that night onwards, whenever he couldn't sleep Max McLean kept him company.

One night while Max read from the Gospel of John, Charlie heard about the resurrection, and it changed the course of his life.

"I had never heard that Jesus physically came back from the dead in a new, slightly different, resurrected form before, and I gave it my undivided attention. When doubting Thomas saw Jesus and Jesus said the words: 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed,' I said to myself right there and then that surely this is the Son of God.

This concept sparked a flame of interest in Charlie and so in January last year he picked up a Bible he had been given for Christmas and began to read.

In April Charlie's faith faltered. Against a backdrop of family turmoil and his own depression, Charlie became overwhelmed and tried to take his own life. At this darkest hour he felt God reach out to him and show him he could be relied upon. God could save him.

"That was when I decided not to trust in man but to trust in God."

Charlie resolved to give himself to God and lead a faithful life. Through the lens of the New Testament he began to make changes in his life.

"I was transformed. Before God came into my life I self-harmed, I argued with my parents, I ate inconsistently and was up weird hours of the night playing on my Xbox. God changed me - I am unrecognisable. I was inspired to go and help people.

"My faith has changed me. Before I was taking and giving nothing back. Now I want to serve people and I find deep meaning in that."

Charlie finished reading the Bible in September and a few weeks later started to attend church at Whitchurch, where he met the Revd James Leach and his wife Debbie. James began one-on-one Bible study with Charlie, finding him an eager student with questions to answer.

Thanks to the love and kindness he found in James and Debbie, Charlie took the next step in this journey of faith on the first day of Advent when he was baptised by full immersion in a river - just as Jesus was.

Today, Charlie works as a gardener, employed by Debbie, and continues walking with God.

"Since then, I have kept up my study of the Bible and I can just about fathom God's amazing plan of salvation through Jesus Christ."

As told to Pathways by Charlie Brennan.



If you have been affected by anything in this article, or you are experiencing a mental health crisis, the Samaritans are there to listen 24 hours a day: [samaritans.org](https://www.samaritans.org)



Asking for help is a strength, and not a weakness. Every parish in the diocese gets prayer support over the course of a year: [oxford.anglican.org/prayer-diary](https://www.oxford.anglican.org/prayer-diary)

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