



A message from Richard

This time last year, I was looking forward to having a three-month sabbatical. I was due to finish on Maundy Thursday and return to BRF in July. How differently things turned out!

In mid-March we concluded there was no way I could take time away from BRF, and a week later we went into lockdown. The rest of 2020 turned out to be probably the most challenging period I have experienced in 32 years at BRF.

What kept me going? What have I learned? I think 2020 changed my perspective. During the early part of lockdown, someone wrote on Facebook that when this was all over, we'd realise three things: how much we have, how little we need and how important relationships are. I couldn't agree more! I've come to realise just how much I've taken for granted. Travel, activities, visiting family and friends, even simple things like being able to buy toilet rolls and flour – suddenly these weren't so straightforward, and still aren't. I've come to appreciate afresh what I do have, the things I am able to do and the people close to me. Prayer has become even more important to me than ever.

During the past year, I have seen, read and heard about so many examples of God at work, of the kindness of strangers, of community spirit, of generosity and of the remarkable ways in which individuals, families, churches and organisations have adapted to the many challenges. I've marvelled at the

creativity of our teams here at BRF, as they have reimagined aspects of our work – some of which you will have read about in recent issues of *BRF News* – and at the inspiration, encouragement, compassion and support they offer across our ministry communities. And I have been humbled by the response – from the countless messages of appreciation and support we have received from BRF readers and those involved in Anna Chaplaincy, Messy Church and Parenting for Faith to the wonderful generosity of everyone who has given financial support.

What am I taking into 2021? Along with a fervent prayer for a successful vaccine and an end to the pandemic, I want to hold on to the perspective I discovered last year, with a greater appreciation for what God has given me, a greater recognition of all that he is doing around me and a deeper desire to play my part in all that lies ahead for BRF.



Canon Richard Fisher,
Chief Executive

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The family outreach tool you're helping to fund

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Cumbria invests in best practice model for older people's ministry

A Lent group to help you in following Jesus

Messy Churches gain permanent access to specialist support

What's your story?

Have our books or notes helped you get through a difficult time? Are you finding the daily Facebook prayers or online videos encouraging? We'd love to hear more. Please get in touch by emailing marketingandcomms@brf.org.uk or writing to the Marketing and Communications Team, BRF, 15 The Chambers, Vineyard, Abingdon OX14 3FE. You can also message us on Facebook.



And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.

PHILIPPIANS 1:9-11 (NIV)

Older peoples' ministry reaches new heights

Anna Chaplaincy has arrived in Cumbria, with the appointment of an interdenominational lead for this ministry, funded by Churches Together in Cumbria.

The Cumbria Churches Together annual conference on dementia (held virtually on 19 September 2020) celebrated five years of churches working across the county to become dementia-friendly; the event also marked the launch of Anna Chaplaincy for Older People in the region.

The virtual conference saw the commissioning of Katherine Froggatt into the new role. Katherine is working closely with the national Anna Chaplaincy team at BRF to develop additional ministry roles of Anna Chaplain and Anna Friend in the region. Julia Burton-Jones (BRF's national church lead for this ministry) is on the advisory group for the project and introduced participants to the history and principles of Anna Chaplaincy.

Bishop of Carlisle James Newcome applauded the work of 140 dementia enablers spanning nine denominations across Cumbria. He said Anna Chaplaincy was an exciting development and would

help to embed the dementia enablers' work in the life of the local church. The CEO of the Alzheimer's Society, Kate Lee, said that Anna Chaplaincy was an 'outstanding programme and would build on achievements so far' in church support for people living with dementia in Cumbria. Beverley Moore from Kendal and Babs Lowe from Barrow-in-Furness spoke passionately about their calling to become Cumbria's first Anna Chaplains.

'An outstanding programme.'

To equip and support Anna Chaplains like Babs and Beverley, in autumn 2020 BRF piloted a virtual training course with a cohort of Anna Friends and Anna Chaplains in Kent. The course will run four times in 2021, held locally in places like Cumbria, where a group of people are preparing together to take on Anna Chaplaincy roles.

Find out what an Anna Chaplain does at annachaplaincy.org.uk/about



Katherine Froggatt, interdenominational lead for Anna Chaplaincy in Cumbria



Beverley Moore and Babs Lowe, Cumbria's first Anna Chaplains

Supporting the vulnerable

Good news from Anna Chaplain Pam Nobbs, who leads the Anna Chaplaincy network members in the north-east.

Her team is in good heart, she says, despite a number of them being in the vulnerable-age category themselves when it comes to coronavirus.

Not only have they been connecting with people via phone, letters, cards and email, but at least one older Anna Chaplain has persisted in learning to use Skype, so she can continue conducting services for her local care home.

Pam says, 'I'm particularly concerned about people's mental health and the way already vulnerable people risk being tipped over the edge as a result of growing isolation.'

'There's more work for Anna Chaplains than ever.'

With fellow Anna Chaplain Margaret Weaver, she's been running an eight-session course on spiritual care throughout the autumn for about a dozen people from in and around Morpeth and Hexham in Northumberland.



Pam Nobbs

Free worship services

Elsewhere, Anna Chaplaincy network member Aaron Reeves has been working with a colleague from the Brighton and Hove City Mission's Rest Homes team on a digital strategy to serve elderly and isolated people.



Aaron Reeves

Their pre-recorded services combine music and prayer with a simple yet profound message of God's love for each one of us, whoever we are and whatever our circumstances. They're a good way of reaching people who are lonely, confined to home, self-isolating or in quarantine, as well as residents of care homes.

You can access the services for free via annachaplaincy.org.uk/post/rest-home-services.

‘Blown away!’

That’s how **Rachel Mitchell**, children and family pastor at Bloxham Baptist Church, near Banbury in Oxfordshire, described her reaction to the changes she saw after she ran the **Parenting for Faith** course last year.

Rachel was passionate about sharing this opportunity with church families and personally wrote to each one inviting them to join. She was delighted when almost all of them did!

‘One parent had us in tears, hearing how her daughter, who has struggled with faith for so long, connected to Father God and felt his reassuring voice,’ says Rachel.

‘One new-to-faith mum shared how she has started praying out loud. Her four-year-old daughter now sings her prayers to God as she plays.

‘Others shared how the course has equipped the dads to start having an active role in their children’s spiritual lives, which previously was unspoken of.



Rachel Mitchell is children and family pastor at Bloxham Baptist Church (photo taken before the Covid pandemic)

‘A group of mums asked for a Sunday school class, as they are new to faith and don’t know their Bible. We now have “Sunday school” for adults before the toddler group on a Thursday morning. It is such a privilege to explore the Bible with people who are hearing these stories for the first time.

‘The changes have been so exciting!’

‘It has been incredible,’ says Rachel. ‘The changes have been so exciting! I have asked the whole leadership team to watch the prayer ministry episode.

‘I believe it’s how all prayer ministry should be done! I used this model with an adult and the experience was incredibly powerful. Their attitude towards the situation changed as they encountered God.’

These experiences are typical of many churches who take part in the Parenting for Faith course. Could your church benefit? The course can be run in groups online or in person, and you can also go through the videos by yourself.

Find out more at parentingforfaith.org/course.

Collaborating nationally to support parents

During the coronavirus crisis of summer 2020, BRF’s Parenting for Faith ministry was excited to take part in the Church of England’s response to the needs of schools, churches and households – the **Faith at Home** project.

Tens of thousands of people viewed the three specially produced video streams:

- **collective worship** for schools to use with students learning at home
- **training videos** helping church leaders resource families during the pandemic
- **videos to support parents** navigating the new challenges.

Free online help through the pandemic

BRF’s Parenting for Faith team were invited to work alongside a wide range of organisations to create videos to help parents and carers initiate faith conversations and try out different ways of exploring faith and worshipping at home.

Nurturing virtues

With contributions from across the denominations and traditions, the videos covered a range of virtues

and topics, including hope, patience, vulnerability, courage, resilience, compassion, love, kindness, flourishing, humility and generosity.

And because life hasn’t stopped being challenging, the videos are all still freely available at churchofengland.org/faith-action/faith-home/faith-home-videos.

An ongoing partnership

Parenting for Faith has now been invited to be part of the next steps of the Church of England’s Growing Faith initiative. The aim is to increase the connections between home, church and school in growing children and young people’s faith.



Rachel Turner, Parenting for Faith Pioneer, helped create and present the videos for parents

Join our Holy Habits Lent group

We would love you (or your church group) to join us on a special journey through Lent as we explore how, throughout his life, Jesus modelled the ten Holy Habits that were to characterise the early church (as described by Luke in Acts 2). You'll be able to join our virtual home group on Facebook or download special videos to use with your own church group.

Join our home group on Facebook



Andrew Roberts

You (and your friends) can join the Facebook group **Holy Habits home group: Following Jesus**. For seven weeks starting on Shrove Tuesday, 16 February (from 7.30–8.30 pm), we'll be meeting to watch a 30-minute video and join a discussion hosted by **Andrew Roberts**, who has pioneered the Holy Habits discipleship approach.

To join the group go to facebook.com/groups/holyhabitsfollowingjesus.

'It has reinforced the fact that people are the "Church":'

A participant in the Facebook group **Holy Habits: Sharing Resources**



Run the course in your own church group

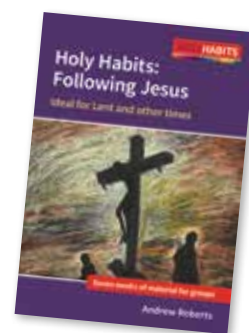
There'll also be seven 15-minute videos you can download to run the Lent course offline with your own group.

'Holy Habits is particularly good for small groups. It provides a gentle introduction and fits well with very natural patterns of life.'

Sally O'Hare, Messy Church leader

Find out more at holyhabits.org.uk/online-home-group.

Holy Habits: Following Jesus is available from brfonline.org.uk



Disciple and scholar

Andrew Roberts pays tribute to the eminent scholar whose work inspired the Holy Habits discipleship approach: the late **James Dunn**.

Jimmy Dunn was a world-class biblical theologian and wonderful human being. With a warm smile and mischievously twinkling eyes, he endeared himself to all he met and garnered respect and friendship in equal measure.

I was privileged to have Jimmy as my personal tutor in Durham when I did my theology degree as part of my ministerial training. Jimmy and his wife regularly invited students to their home. The first time we went, the door was opened by a beaming Jimmy, resplendent in an immaculate suit and a Heinz Tomato Soup apron. The look encapsulated the man. Vivacious, welcoming and always interested in others.

Like so many, I was deeply impacted by Jimmy's writing and teaching. His lectures were always fun. As a world-class scholar, he knew all the big words, but had that precious gift of making the complex simple, and the accessibility of his work marked him out.

Together with his predecessor as Professor of New Testament – Kingsley Barrett – he provided an approach to biblical study that has shaped my life and ministry. He and Barrett also provided the scholarly foundations for Holy Habits.

'The phrase "enthusiastic spiritual renewal" was catalytic.'

In his Acts commentary, Jimmy said this about Luke's portrait of the early church on which Holy Habits is based:

'The portrayal may be somewhat idealised... But anyone who is familiar with movements of *enthusiastic spiritual renewal* will recognise authentic notes: the enthusiasm of the members of the renewal group, with a sense of overflowing joy, desire to come together frequently, eating together

and worshipping and including the readiness for unreserved commitment to one another in a shared common life.'¹

The phrase 'enthusiastic spiritual renewal' was catalytic. It shaped Jimmy's life, inspired the development of Holy Habits and remains a prayerful aim for all those who explore this way of forming missional disciples of Jesus.



Professor James Dunn, whose work helped shape Holy Habits

¹ James Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Peterborough: Epworth 1996), p. 34.

A special Easter book for families to share

BRF is passionate about enabling all ages to grow in faith together, and this Easter we're offering a new resource for families that we hope will do just that.

Many great Bible resources are designed for adults to read to children or for children to read by themselves. Our new book *The Easter Story* has a different vision: to encourage an interactive family time of Bible study and prayer, where everyone feels engaged and older children can take a leading role!

Written by Martyn Payne, a storyteller with a passion for intergenerational ministry, each section offers a brief comment on the Bible passage, questions to discuss, a visual aid, an activity idea, a prayer idea, a key verse and an Old Testament story link.*



Thanks to your generous donations, we have been able to supply 1,000 copies free of charge to churches across the country. You can also buy copies from brfonline.org.uk/theeasterstory for just £2.50, with discounts for packs and bulk orders.

* Text originally published in *The Barnabas Family Bible*, available from brfonline.org.uk

'This will be a great gift for Messy Church families – the teams will be popping it in a "Messianic Church in a Bag" or handing it out at an April Messy Church session for households to take home and enjoy together. It's lovely to be able to offer affordable resources like this!'

Lucy Moore, Messy Church founder



Meeting with God around the world

Each of BRF's Bible reading notes series has its own particular flavour – and one is distinctly international!

For 85 years, *The Upper Room* has been nurturing Christians in their daily devotions – from Osaka to Ottawa, from Copenhagen to Cape Town. And many of them don't just read the reflections – they write them too, giving unique glimpses into God's grace at work in the lives of our Christian brothers and sisters in 100 countries around the world.

The Upper Room is translated into over 30 languages and published by a number of publishing partners around the globe. While BRF is the publisher for the UK edition, the editorial work happens at Upper Room Ministries in Nashville, Tennessee, where Tia Runion

is responsible for supporting the global partners.

'I'm always impressed with writing that speaks to God's presence in the small, seemingly ordinary moments of our lives,' says Tia. 'Short meditations like this may be simple, but they're often incredibly profound.'



'It's a simple way to spend daily time with God in prayer and scripture reading.'

Tia Runion, Upper Room Ministries



"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland." ISAIAH 43:18-19 (NIV)

Save the date for Wells in the Wilderness

Our annual women's conference is coming to you online this spring...

Friday 23 April 2021
10.00 am – 3.00 pm
£15.00 including a voucher to spend on a book of your choice at brfonline.org.uk*

brfonline.org.uk/wellsinthewilderness

*Receive a discount code for £7.50 off at brfonline.org.uk. Standard P&P charges and a minimum spend of £7.50 apply.

Au revoir 'Messy' Jane!

At the end of 2020 we said 'au revoir' to a hugely talented, energetic and much-loved member of the BRF team. For ten years **Jane Leadbetter** worked alongside Lucy Moore and others to grow the ministry into the worldwide mission it is today. Though officially retiring, we look forward to carrying on working with Jane in a voluntary capacity in the years ahead. Here she reflects on her time with BRF.

Change can be uncomfortable. But not for God. According to Ecclesiastes 3:1, everything has its season; there is a time for every matter in life. In verse 11, we are reminded that 'he has made everything beautiful in its time'. Each activity is for the right time, bringing about God's purposes. What a privilege it has been to be part of God's purpose at BRF these past ten years. As I enter retirement, I know that God has further purposes for me and for BRF. But God never changes, and we are called to enjoy life in the present, with him.

A joyous roller coaster

The past decade has been a joyous roller coaster of an adventure for me. Joining Lucy and the staff at BRF in 2010 was like jumping on a fairground ride and being propelled to a great height, legs dangling precariously in the air, hair swept back by the breeze and constantly taking sharp intakes of breath as God tossed and turned us on a Messy Church adventure. Where would Messy Church be going? What would it look like in five years' time? Or ten? Communicating with others around the world, as Messy Churches popped up overseas, was exciting yet challenging, as was developing a worldwide network of supporters for these Messy Churches. Seeing different denominations and cultures embrace this Messy intergenerational ministry had us praying further, as we remained a tiny team – and yet God was growing the ministry!

Seeing God at work

The enjoyment has been priceless. Highlights are numerous: from Messy Fiestas, in the early days, to Messy Meet-ups on mountains and in dales; from international conferences to Messy Church Does Science roadshows; from delivering training overseas to writing



Jane with her flock of Messy Nativity sheep

books and resources; Messy Nativity sheep trails may have featured a bit, too! I have heard so many stories of how God has been at work in the lives of Messy Church teams and congregations and how communities have worked together to bring hope in difficult times. I have made so many friends that my heart just bursts with love for them all. They all have Messy creativity and passion in common – like Lucy Moore. As founder and leader, Lucy is the most creative person I have ever met, and I have learnt so much from her. I am sure you can only imagine how wonderful it has been for me to be around so many faith-filled and talented colleagues and friends.



Jane with Lucy Moore and former Messy Church team member Martyn Payne, in 2017

Making a difference together

I am hoping that after a short break I will return to BRF and Messy Church as a supporter, depending on what God's purpose is. Change can be refreshing and energising, no matter how young or old you may be. I enjoy other voluntary

activities. I will still be scouting in some way, producing programmes and enabling all ages to develop their skills. I have been a member of the Scouts for over 30 years and, like Messy Church, it is a God-given passion I cannot escape. The environment and plastics issues are other areas I am passionate about. I encourage everyone to make small changes to their daily habits so that we can make a big difference together. I trained as an Ecobricks Trainer so that I could offer workshops explaining the hazards of plastics and showing how to put unrecyclable plastics to good use inside a plastic bottle. Ecobrick building projects are popping up all over the world. I am still learning from so many people.

'So many stories of how God has been at work in Messy Church teams and congregations'

In the midst of all of this is a small Christian charity called The Bible Reading Fellowship, which supports Messy Church. It is nearly 100 years since BRF started producing daily Bible reading notes for a few parishioners, and it continues to nurture the faith of everyone it comes into contact with. My prayer is that we all listen to and accept God's purposes, even if that means change. Be bold and strong, for the Lord your God is with you.

Extracted from *Get Messy!* January–April 2021

A paintbox of teams!

Meanwhile we're splashing out into a new way of supporting local Messy Churches up and down the UK, thanks to scores of wonderful, generous volunteers.

Mostly drawn from the Messy Church regional coordinator network, these experienced practitioners are now offering their skills in a new way. We're no longer basing our support on geography. ('Your Messy Church is in Hampshire, so you get the Hampshire regional coordinator to support you.') Instead, the teams are grouped to respond to specific needs in the network, like 'How do we start?' or 'We need online training.'

There are nine teams in all – each one with a colour to distinguish it, a small leadership group within it and a particular brief. We're grateful to the 60 people who have offered their skills and time to be part of this new approach, and we pray that it will enable us to be even more help to Messy Churches across the UK.

It looks as if 2021 will be a year in which Messy Church takes a giant step forward as a newly appointed Messy Church coordinator begins equipping the teams in January.

Do pray for the new teams – perhaps you'd even like to 'adopt' one and pray for that team in particular? If so, we'd love you to get in touch so we can make sure you know what the needs are.



Prayer – praying for Messy Church and helping the network to pray better



Pool of Wisdom – a group to help organise events and offer general advice



Trainers – who will work with the BRF team to deliver more and better training online



Advocates – the team that will be available to promote BRF and to help with fundraising



Getting Going – helping a church get started with Messy Church



Alongsiders – offering missional accompaniment



Specialists – offering specialist advice, such as special needs and geographical focus where applicable



Storykeepers – who support Lucy Moore, the Messy Church founder and team leader



Writers and Readers – who contribute to the resources we publish online and in print

Messy Church shout-out!

A big shout-out to the vivacious **Hannah Tarring** from Wiltshire!



Hannah works tirelessly to build up her Messy Church families and to keep the Wiltshire Messy Churches connected. She's thrown herself into the online world, filled bags with faith-related objects and shared her faith unstintingly over the Covid period. Messy Harvest! Messy Light Party! The woman is unstoppable. She generously visited BRF to advise us and give us a younger person's view on various projects we were planning. Hannah's cheerfulness, calm liveliness and generosity have been a huge encouragement to so many of us during 2020 – hooray for Hannah!

Creativity bubbles on

You might think that Messy Churches have shut down for good during the pandemic. But that would be very far from the truth. We've been enjoying the creative ways Messy leaders have reimagined ministry under severe restrictions!

Like Hannah, many have gone online, including **Barry Brand** (right), who entertained us on Facebook Live, by telling us about the 72 Noah's ark animals he made from toilet rolls during online



sessions with his Messy Church families. Others have offered Messy Church in a bag or box, like **Mary Judkins**, who's been filling large envelopes with exciting things for her Messy families in Cornwall. And others have kept in touch with texts or calls, or even ventured into meeting again in a Covid-safe way, as in Ross-on-Wye, where they held their first ever Messy Church in October under strict restrictions! What an amazing bunch of leaders!

Thank you for your support

We are hugely thankful and humbled by the generous support of individuals, churches and charitable trusts who have given to BRF's ministry in recent months.

Together, you have helped us to continue serving the church and deliver our ministries in new ways to people at a time when it is most needed.

Whether you've donated to our 2020 appeal, bought our Christmas cards, signed up to give regularly through Friends of BRF or held our ministry up in prayer, thank you.

We could not do what we do without you – may the Lord bless you.

'A Carer's Guide' series

These new booklets were developed and launched in July last year to give carers the resources, skills and confidence to support the spiritual well-being of those in their care. Thanks to generous donations we were able to supply copies free of charge to our Anna Chaplaincy network to use with care homes and residents.

With visits so restricted, these continue to be a timely and much-needed resource.

They have proven so popular that we needed to reprint them to meet the ongoing need for spiritual care for older people.



With your help we can reach more



We are constantly raising funds to help us develop new resources like *The Easter Story* for families (see page 5). If you would like to contribute to this and other outreach initiatives, please contact our fundraising team on 01235 462305 or via giving@brf.org.uk.

Christmas cards

A huge thank you to all who bought our charity Christmas cards last year, generating vital funds for our ministry.



This was the first time we'd sold Christmas cards, so we're thrilled with the response and are planning new Christmas card designs for 2021. Likewise, many have given additional donations alongside their order. **Thank you all.**



Friends of BRF

We are delighted to have received such a positive response to the Friends of BRF opportunity, as supporters have signed up to give regularly.

Regular donations help us plan for the future, deliver our existing projects and start new ones.

Anna Hawken, national coordinator for Parenting for Faith, writes:

'It's so good to know that there are people partnering with us on this journey to make Parenting for Faith resources freely available to everyone who needs them. We're so excited about the future and what will be possible with your prayers and financial support.'

You can find out more about giving regularly at brf.org.uk/friends.

Do get in touch for copies of our Friends of BRF flyer to share, at giving@brf.org.uk or by calling 01235 462305.

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