



Embracing a new future

Karen Laister, head of marketing and communications, shares how the need to take communications online has opened up new opportunities to reach out, be creative and involve more people.



In the past twelve months many of us have felt acutely the pain of separation from family and friends as contact has been severely restricted. Like

other organisations, BRF had to quickly find ways to communicate differently. Much of our work and ministries moved online when in-person training and events were no longer possible. It quickly became evident that there were some advantages, particularly in our ability to reach more people and support those who are involved in our ministries.

Prior to the pandemic, the Parenting for Faith team had been hosting Facebook events for parents and for children's, youth and family leaders, and Messy Church had also been experimenting with Facebook events and conference calling. Both teams were therefore already in a good position to resource their networks with online get-togethers, training and courses. Our Anna Chaplaincy team for the first time brought together the network for a special Zoom gathering to share experiences and express concerns about the worrying situation staff and residents in care homes were facing.

Like many other Christian charities, organisations and churches, we learnt we could communicate with our various communities effectively and quickly online. We were also able to include our volunteers, Messy Church leaders, Anna Chaplains and others in offering support and training and sharing ideas. It was apparent that they too wanted to find ways of continuing to support Messy Church families and care homes and showing Christian service in their local community, while adhering to

government guidelines. The creativity, ideas and commitment to mission were something BRF was able to facilitate.

In the past six months we have been developing online courses, some of which we have started to roll out at the beginning of this year, making them accessible to more people – including those who couldn't attend in-person events because of location, cost or time.

Creating fellowship, extending our reach

So, what are our online plans for this year? In this edition of *BRF News* you can read about some of these initiatives. I am particularly excited about the short act of worship we are piloting on weekdays at Pentecost, which you can read about on page 6.

'But online and social media are not for me,' I hear you cry. We are aware that virtual meet-ups will never be a true substitute for in-person events and training nor for meeting together to share our faith in small groups. They do, however, enable us to create fellowship for BRF's communities and offer support to many more people.

Keep in touch with our training, events and networking opportunities at brf.org.uk/events.



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'Even online, the Forge is so different to any other conference. After months of carefully creating online content and activity packs for families, it was a joy to be on the receiving end of such a thoughtful and well-put-together event just for us!'

Online participant,
The Forge retreat for children's, youth and family leaders (Parenting for Faith)

'Thank you so much for a most wonderful Anna Chaplaincy gathering this week. It has been such a difficult year and I was so glad to be able to acknowledge some of the feelings and share stories of hope and resilience... So thankful that I haven't been on my own but part of a bigger organisation. It has made me feel supported.'

Online participant,
The Gathering (Anna Chaplaincy)

*'See! The winter is past;
the rains are over and gone.
Flowers appear on the earth.'*

SONG OF SOLOMON 2:11-12



Hello from Julie and the fundraising team

Thanks so much for standing alongside us in tough times with the new, fun, easy ways to raise funds for our work.

The past twelve months have been incredibly hard for many of us. During this time, the fundraising team have introduced several new initiatives to help fund our ministry, and we are incredibly grateful for your generous response.

To everyone who has used Give as you Live, Amazon Smile and Fit4Change to give us a bit extra at no cost to you, thank you – it all adds up. To find out more, see brf.org.uk/other-ways-give.

As we look forward to Easter and a new financial year, we're excited about the opportunities that lie ahead, including our centenary celebrations in 2022.

Please remember us in prayer as we work to raise funds for BRF. We're always happy to hear from you via giving@brf.org.uk, on 01235 462305 or by post.

Beautiful new cards for Easter and everyday

Many of you commented when ordering Christmas cards that you'd love for us to offer Easter cards and everyday cards too. So that's what we're doing! You'll find six designs of each at brfonline.org.uk/cards.



Our new fundraiser trustee



Last year we were delighted to welcome Andrew Barton to our board of trustees.

Andrew has worked in the charity sector for over 15 years, leading fundraising teams at World Vision, Oxfam and Christian Aid. Based near Milton Keynes with his wife Kath, he's now a fundraising consultant. He's also a keen walker, gardener and allotment keeper.

Alongside his consultancy work, Andrew is studying for a certificate

in philanthropic psychology and he's excited to bring new insights from his research to his work supporting BRF's fundraising team.

'BRF does some amazing work, but it is quite a challenge for fundraising,' Andrew says. 'There isn't an immediate tangible need, like feeding hungry children. However, many of us will want to support BRF's work because it reflects who we are: our identity as Christians who want to grow in faith.' After all, many of us are Bible notes readers, or book buyers, or Messy Church volunteers, and are interested in growing our faith.

Andrew's philanthropic passions have always been 'mission and international development, with a sideline in environment and ecology'. He was drawn

to BRF because of its impact. 'The first thing that struck me was the difference BRF makes with just 40 paid staff and an awful lot of volunteer effort,' he says. 'BRF is working on crucial issues like helping children and families discover faith and helping an ageing population with its spiritual needs.'

These are missional areas that I'm interested in, and I'd like to think that, with the skills I bring, I can help propel BRF fundraising forward in such a way to provide the resources to enable the charity to

flourish and achieve even more.'

And the 'off-duty' Andrew?

'My wife would probably question whether there ever is an off-duty Andrew!', he says. 'I'm now about two years into retirement, and I'm still doing quite a bit of work – fundraising feels like a vocation for me.'

'The first thing that struck me was the difference BRF makes on crucial issues.'

Anna Chaplaincy heroes

During the coronavirus pandemic, Anna Chaplains have been spending on average ten hours a week spiritually supporting older people – almost half of it with people who aren't church members. **Julia Burton-Jones**, BRF's church lead for Anna Chaplaincy for Older People, reveals new research findings.

In autumn 2020, a survey was completed by 80 members of the Anna Chaplaincy network. They shared details of their role both before and during the pandemic.

A generous offering

Over three quarters who responded were volunteers, yet the average time spent per week in their role was 12.6 hours, falling to 10 hours during Covid-19. Most common elements of ministry were spending time talking with an older person in their home (fulfilled by 68%) and leading a service with care home residents (fulfilled by 67%). On average 47% of time spent on their ministry was with older people who are not members of the church.

The biggest change to ministry prompted by the pandemic has been moving to telephone rather than face-to-face contact.

'I can have no face-to-face contact, so visits are virtual and contacts are through letters, cards and phone calls.'

Anna Chaplain

Providing older people with a sense of belonging and being valued were identified as key benefits of Anna Chaplaincy; members of the network also appreciated feeling connected through BRF to one another, valuing opportunities to meet others who share their calling. Asked how well met were spiritual needs of older people in their communities, 61% said 'we could do more', 33% 'we could do a lot more'.

Findings of the survey will be published in late April, and we are taking what we have heard from the network to develop the support and resourcing BRF offers to Anna Chaplains.



'Lunch club has become a takeaway service, church service has become a monthly DVD, visiting has become weekly telephone calls and Communion has become telephone calls to care-home residents.'

Anna Chaplain

Church planting – the Messy Vintage way!

Jill Phipps and Katie Norman from BRF's Messy Vintage team bring us up to speed with this much-loved, interactive way of 'being church', designed predominately for older people, though embracing all ages.

Messy Vintage started in the island of Jersey, in a rural church where the number of Sunday worshippers was rapidly declining, while the mid-week Messy Church was bursting at the seams. This got the team thinking: was there a Christ-centred, 'messy' way to reach out to older folk?

A vision from God

Talks and prayers went on for some time, until one day a vision came to one of the team, and everyone knew that this was it: God was asking them to plant a church. And so, Messy Vintage was born – and soon grew, not only in their church setting but in local care homes and dementia centres too. It wasn't to stop there. Soon it hopped across the water to the UK, where others, eager to serve their communities, captured the vision and started up their own Messy Vintage. Sadly the Covid pandemic has made

face-to-face meetings impossible for much of the past year. But, whether in the community or in care homes, older people and the staff who care for them have been supported, encouraged and remembered in prayer.

Supporting from a distance

Gift bags containing prayers, readings, quizzes, crafts and stories have been deposited on doorsteps. Tins of biscuits, hand cream and cards of encouragement have been delivered to care homes. Several of the BRF Anna Chaplaincy strategy team wrote, and with the marvellous BRF publishing team, produced five booklets to support care staff in their work. These include tips on how to look after yourself in stressful times and help in leading worship with individual residents or with a group. They are a valuable resource as residential home activity coordinators have suddenly had to become worship leaders as well.



Making apple bird feeders for the garden is one of the Messy Vintage activities for celebrating creation.

Katie and Jill's new book offering 52 Messy Vintage session plans is out now. Go to messychurch.org.uk/messy-vintage.



‘They’re not asking for you – they’ve prayed for you!’

When those close to Jane Butler heard she’d applied for the new Messy Church coordinator role, they were amazed at the fit. It was clearly an answer to prayer.

As a mum to two boys, Jane had helped her local church’s children’s ministry develop into a fully-fledged Messy Church with a monthly congregation of 70. (When we called her for this interview, she’d just collated 150 bags to give out to families for ‘Christingle in a bag’.) She also worked on parish communications. ‘It got to the point where I was more passionate about that than about my longstanding IT job,’ says Jane. Eventually she stepped out in faith and took voluntary redundancy.

While Jane had no clear plan, God did! Hearing about the new Messy Church vacancy, her first thought was, ‘I’ve just

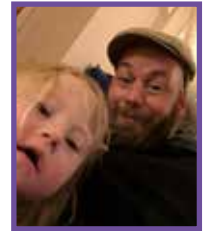
walked away from a secure job – and my dream job has suddenly become available!’

‘What I’m really looking forward to,’ she adds, ‘is meeting people, albeit virtually – and eventually spending time with them in person. I want to help equip people for where we are currently, hooking up those that need support with the right expertise through the new Messy Church volunteer teams.’

With her passion for Jesus and the church and her love of spreadsheets, we’re confident that ‘Tidy Jane’ will be a huge asset to our Messy ministry!

Messy Church shout-out!

A big Messy shout-out for Mikael Dapefrid from the far north of Sweden – possibly the most northerly Messy Church in the world.



A creative through and through, Mikael is a great communicator, passionate about sharing the gospel message in ever-more imaginative ways, Messy Church being one of them. As well as this, he’s got a great gift of encouragement and regularly rings Lucy up simply to be supportive and to reassure her of his daily prayers. He’s one of the supportive pillars of Messy Church internationally, who picks you up when you’re feeling low and who takes you off enthusiastically in directions you’d never dreamed of. His delightful family often join him in his Messiness. He’s a great example of someone who *does* a tremendous amount but who *is* even more.



BRF’s Messy Church team can’t wait for May, when they’ll be hosting their first online Messy Church Festival, as Lucy Moore, Messy Church founder and team leader, explains.

Rejoicing in the name of **Messtival**, on 22 May we’ll be inviting Messy people from all over the UK to join us online for a fun-filled morning of workshops and creative discussion groups, followed by an afternoon Messy Church session open to all. We’ll kick off by sharing ideas, solving problems, learning new skills and being inspired about new ways to start or restart our Messy Churches after lockdown restrictions. In the afternoon, we’ll be opening the virtual doors to families and anyone else who’d like to join in – either as a household, a Messy Church gathering or simply at home on their own – as we aspire to achieve an entry in *Guinness World Records* for the Biggest Messy Church Ever.

One of the new support teams is the Pool of Wisdom team, made up of generous people who’ve been involved in Messy Church for a long time and are adept at organising events while bringing in all the **Messy Church values**, letting their imaginations run riot. They’ve been busy planning the online Messtival (on Zoom) and bringing their formidable creative gifts to play to make it the most **hospitable, Christ-centred, all-age, creative celebration** it can possibly be.

Join in the Biggest Messy Church Ever

Why not join us? To book a place for the morning sessions, go to messychurch.org.uk/messtival. For the afternoon’s Biggest Messy Church Ever, you could join in on your own or, even better, make it part of your church’s *Thy Kingdom Come* Pentecost celebrations and invite your local community.

For month-by-month updates, sign up for the Messy Church newsletter at messychurch.org.uk/newsletter.



Helping churches engage families

We're excited about Parenting for Faith's new video and book resources to help churches embrace and encourage new parents and young families.

Recent research* revealed 62% of all parents of under-fives have attended a church activity for this age group in the past year, but they wouldn't call themselves active Christians. Over *half* of these parents (55%) say that they have explored their own beliefs because of attending these activities. That means an enormous opportunity exists to share God's love and truth with families with under-fives. So in February, Parenting for Faith launched a set of resources designed to equip and support both parents and the churches who love them. Included are:

- a new book written specifically for families on the fringe of faith, *Babies and Toddlers: Nurturing your child's spiritual life*, which gently shares how parents can help their children meet and know God even as they themselves are exploring faith
- a set of videos to enable toddler



groups and parents' groups to explore small ways to help their families engage with God

- dedication- and baptism-preparation videos for clergy and family leaders to watch with parents and godparents, exploring simple ways to help their children meet and know God
- an online Babies and Toddlers training morning to equip churches to empower families to take their next steps in faith.

We hope we can directly inspire parents, no matter where they are in their faith journey, to know that they can be significant in the spiritual nurture of their children. We also hope to give the wider church confidence in seeing families with children of all ages and stages 'parenting for faith'.

parentingforfaith.org/babies-and-toddlers

**Talking Toddlers*, May 2020, a report commissioned by HOPE Together, the Church of England and the Evangelical Alliance.



A supportive community

Thousands of parents and church leaders value the encouragement Parenting for Faith's dynamic online communities offer, especially on Facebook. Every month, three live 'Bedtime Drinks' get-togethers (for parents of children aged 0-5, 5-11 and 11+) focus discussion on a topical issue. **Children's, youth and family leaders** connect through their own special Facebook group, with live input at monthly 'Lunch with Rachel' sessions. Another private Facebook group provides a safe and supportive space for **church leader parents** to share their unique challenges.

'I'm so very grateful for Rachel, her perspective and work'

A Parenting for Faith Facebook follower

Join the conversation at [Facebook.com/parentingforfaithBRF](https://www.facebook.com/parentingforfaithBRF).

Far too good to keep quiet about

It was attending their retreat for children's, youth and family leaders that won **Kate Irvine** over to Parenting for Faith.



'I can honestly say those three days changed both me and my ministry. I felt empowered, refreshed and resourced to go and make a difference – and gained friends to journey with who I'm still in touch with today.'

Six years on, Kate is now a part-time networker on Parenting for Faith's staff team: 'It's far too good a resource – for all kinds of churches – to keep quiet about!' she says. 'I'd already been spreading the word locally when I saw the role advertised, and jumped at the chance to talk to a wider audience.'

Kate's work connects her with church and theology college leaders. 'I want to play my part both in listening to leaders and helping them to support their own families and those in their congregation.'

Kate first discovered Parenting for Faith when her own children were teenagers. 'The five Key Tools really helped my husband and I let them see how we connect with God every day,' she says. 'I also loved unpacking "Chat and Catch" prayer with the children in our junior church – moments I will never forget.'

'I enjoy being part of BRF – a charity with home mission at its heart and an organised approach to furthering the kingdom of God – and seeing people flourish as they are equipped to share their faith.'

Kate invites any churches interested in Parenting for Faith to email her at kate.irvine@brf.org.uk.

Let's travel together!

Our **Living Faith ministry** aims to support your individual spiritual journey – whether it's through our popular notes that bring your daily Bible reading to life, our book resources, our print and audio downloads or the increasing opportunities to encourage each other online. This spring, why not try out something new?

Join our online prayer community!

Find and follow us on Facebook ([@thebiblereadingfellowship](https://www.facebook.com/thebiblereadingfellowship)) or Twitter ([brfonline](https://twitter.com/brfonline)) for our **daily prayer posts**, inspired by our ministries and charity work and written by a variety of BRF authors and contributors. You can also find more ways to pray with us at brf.org.uk/pray.

Enter an online prayer and worship space

From 13 May to 23 May we'll be offering **live prayers and worship** on Facebook as we anticipate Pentecost with BRF staff, volunteers, authors and contributors as part of the Thy Kingdom Come international and ecumenical prayer initiative. Check in at Facebook.com/thebiblereadingfellowship.



Wells in the Wilderness

The BRF 2021 women's conference, Friday 23 April, 10.00 am–3.00 pm on Zoom

You're invited to enjoy a 'day out' at home with our first-ever online women's day. This year we'll be exploring how God provides for us in the wilderness and the desert, drawing from a whole host of biblical wells, waters and springs.

Your host for the day is author and blogger **Amy Boucher Pye**, who also runs the Woman Alive book club. Amy will also be giving us a biblical reflection on Isaiah 43.

Speakers also include:

- **Mags Duggan**, on the language of lament. Mags is an author, retreat leader, lecturer, spiritual director and former missionary.
- **Catherine Butcher**, author and communications director for HOPE Together, whose talk promises to encourage us to embrace God's new opportunities.
- **Rachel Turner**, author and BRF's Parenting for Faith pioneer, whose theme will be 'the glorious now'.

- **Claire Musters**, writer, speaker and editor, who will be talking to us about change.

We look forward to welcoming you for a day of thought-provoking speakers, heartfelt worship and opportunities to connect with women of all ages across the country.

How to book

Tickets cost £15, which includes a £7.50 voucher to spend on a book of your choice at brfonline.org.uk (minimum spend £7.50). Tickets are available at brfonline.org.uk/wellsinthewilderness.



*'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)

Earthed in the everyday

Guidelines – BRF’s companion notes for more in-depth study of the Bible – might be serious stuff, but its writers certainly aren’t stuffy. We talked to contributor **Kate Bruce**.



Kate Bruce is an RAF chaplain with a PhD in preaching and imagination. She writes regularly for our *Guidelines* Bible study notes and, when circumstances allow, she speaks at conferences on preaching and leads retreats. And lest that make her sound too serious, she has a side hustle in stand-up comedy,

with acts called ‘Woman of the Cloth’ and ‘White Collar Comedy’. ‘As a teacher of preaching,’ she said in an interview with the *Church Times**, ‘I have long believed that preachers can learn a great deal from stand-up comedians, especially in terms of delivery and timing. I feel I can watch comedy and call it work.’

So, in the midst of such a busy life, why does Kate make time to write for *Guidelines*? ‘Writing for *Guidelines* gives me time to explore themes I might not otherwise have thought much about. It pushes me to explore the connections between the Bible and the everyday. The limited word length focuses the mind. I try to read my own work critically – does it feel resonant? Is it earthed in the everyday? I’m always wary of simple answers and ideas which crush by not factoring in the pain and complexity of much of life.’

Read more at brfonline.org.uk/kate-bruce-blog.

**Church Times*, 10 May 2019



Winning new writers

We’re delighted with the response to the latest *Upper Room* writing competition, designed to encourage new writers. With over 70 entries, there were many reflections of an exceptionally high standard.



The final selection was made by our head of content creation, Olivia Warburton, who says, ‘What a rewarding task it was to judge the entries for this year’s *Upper Room* writing competition, although it wasn’t completely straightforward to make the final selection from such a strong field

of thoughtful, inspiring reflections!’

The winner was retired teacher and self-supporting minister **Andrew Dutton**, for a moving piece entitled ‘Called by name’, about his visit to a German war cemetery. The runners up were **Valerie Eker**, for ‘Finishing the race’, and **Clare O’Driscoll**, for ‘Slow swim’. You can find out more about the winners and read their entries at brfonline.org.uk/blog. Their work will be published in a future issue of *The Upper Room*.

Andrew has used *The Upper Room* for several years. He told us why: ‘It reminds me that I am part of a worldwide church. I have found so many contributions from people far away which spoke to me, personally, of the things of God.’

Read more at brfonline.org.uk/ur2020results.

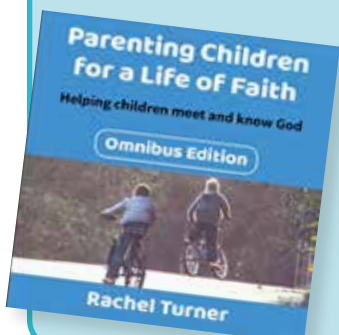


New audiobooks – choose one for free

Two popular books by Parenting for Faith’s Rachel Turner are now available as audiobooks from Audible (audible.co.uk). If you’re a new Audible subscriber, you can even choose one as your first download for free.

Rachel’s soothing reading of *Comfort in the Darkness* brings young children reassurance at bedtime and offers ways for parents to create safe spaces for a conversation about God. The audio version of *Parenting Children for a Life of Faith (omnibus edition)*, also read by Rachel, is ideal listening for any parents wanting to nurture their children’s faith more confidently. You can also enjoy a free audio sample of each book when you search on amazon.co.uk for the audio editions of each book.

The Torch Trust also offers audio versions of BRF’s *New Daylight* Bible reading notes, exclusively for those with sight loss. To find out more, call 01858 438260 or go to torchtrust.org.



Welcome to the BRF community!

Over the years BRF has developed a close-knit community of staff, volunteers and supporters, each of whom brings a unique contribution to our mission to enable all ages to grow in faith.

Celebrating volunteers



As we look to develop and celebrate volunteering across BRF, we've appointed a new volunteer advocate, **Jane Butcher**. Jane started in this new post last

September, though she is no stranger to the BRF team, having joined 13 years ago working with Barnabas in Schools and Children and Families. One of her key roles is to support, train and develop our existing volunteers as well as to encourage more to join us.

So, what do people gain from volunteering? Eileen, one of our enthusiastic Anna Chaplains, explains: 'It is exactly two years since I first started as a volunteer at my local care home. The work I do brings me such personal satisfaction and is, I believe, the most effective work of Christian outreach in our local community I have ever done.'

We'd love you to join us!

We have a team of amazing volunteers across the country and around the world, who share their time, skills and support within our Messy Church, Anna Chaplaincy, Parenting for Faith and Living Faith ministries. We're also gathering a team of **volunteer church advocates** to represent BRF (across all ministries) in their local church and area. *Could you help or do you know someone who could?*

Whether they have a little or a lot of time, have previous experience or none, feel confident speaking to others or not, and whatever their age, we would love to hear from anyone who has heart for what BRF does and would be willing to help us continue this vital work in our local and wider communities.

As David, one of our key Messy Church volunteers, says, 'I volunteered (reluctantly!) and it has changed my life since retiring from work. Through it I have done all sorts of things I never



Volunteering for BRF can help you grow your personal ministry and make new friends (Messy Church International Conference, 2019).

thought I'd dare do. I have met some wonderful people and discovered that I missed my true vocation in life.'

It needn't be a lifelong commitment – we understand that personal circumstances change. However long you're with us, you can be assured of a warm welcome, good training and support, and a sense of being appreciated and valued as part of our team.

If you or anyone you know might be interested to chat further, contact jane.butcher@brf.org.uk.



Two weddings and a baby

Despite difficult times, there have still been occasions to celebrate in the BRF community.

There was joyful news at the end of last year as two valued staff members – one current, one former – celebrated their weddings.

At the end of 2020, Debbie Thrower, BRF's pioneer for Anna Chaplaincy for Older People, married her partner Charles.

And the former editor of *New Daylight* Bible reading notes, Naomi Starkey – now a regular contributor – married fellow *New Daylight* writer and BRF author Andy John.

In January we welcomed back Maddie Jane, our super-efficient programmes delivery manager, from maternity leave. Here she is with baby Heidi, who celebrated her first birthday on New Year's Day! Judith Moore, who valiantly held the fort in Maddie's absence, now joins our fundraising team.



Debbie with husband Charles



Naomi with husband Andy



Maddie with baby Heidi

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