



## A season of recovery

Karen Laister, head of marketing and communications, considers how we as the church might help the nation recover from the Covid-19 crisis.



During the past few months, we have heard wonderful stories of churches and individual Christians imaginatively and creatively serving

their local communities, despite the restrictions. The pandemic has wrought unprecedented problems and leaves a legacy of broken lives and deep scars across society. Lockdown has given us a new understanding of isolation, loneliness and mental health issues. Debbie Thrower, BRF's Anna Chaplaincy pioneer, talks about a 'tsunami of grief' being unleashed when we emerge from the pandemic.

### Responding with compassion, action and hope

In the post-pandemic world, churches will need to be places of healing for those who have lost loved ones, those who have suffered or continue to suffer from Covid-19 or other illness, and those who have lost their job or had their work or education disrupted.

Jesus' ministry was practical: he met people in their need, and healed and restored them. He accompanied his words with action, he showed compassion and he gave hope. Emerging from this pandemic, many people will need practical, emotional *and* spiritual support. Through our ministries, we hope to resource and equip the church for this calling.

'Thank you again for all that you are doing at BRF to help people like me to feel engaged and part of a community of faith. A community which is trying to hold on to and to experience the reality of the "Incarnational God" despite the disorientating times we find ourselves living in.'

Judith Allen, *Guidelines* reader, Cornwall

Many Messy Church leaders are itching to welcome families back, and Anna Chaplains are longing to resume offering spiritual care to older people. At the same time, it's inspiring to hear about people like Pam Shaw, an 82-year-old newly licensed Anna Chaplain who has managed to visit a care home and listened as one of the residents recounted her faith.

### Responding in prayer

The needs that this pandemic has thrown up may feel overwhelming. In the aftermath, we may all want to ask ourselves how we can make a difference. A start pointing for a Christian is prayer, and this month the annual prayer initiative Thy Kingdom Come is taking place. From Ascension to Pentecost, we are encouraged to pray for people to come to know Jesus.

As a result, starting on 17 May, BRF is inviting you to join us online for prayer each weekday morning over the subsequent six weeks. See the back page for more details.

We hope the articles in this edition of *BRF News* will inspire you to also pray for our ministries and those in your local churches who exercise them.

As we take the next steps in this pandemic, may the words of the much-loved hymn give us 'strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, Blessings all [ours], with ten thousand beside!'

Find out ways to pray with us at [brf.org.uk/pray](https://brf.org.uk/pray)

### IN THIS ISSUE:

New research confirms Parenting for Faith's impact

What does an Anna Friend do?

Mobilising Messy Churches

Meet our long-time supporter Shirley

### We can help you make a difference!

As churches begin to consider their roadmap to gathering together again and reintroducing activities, the age-old question of how to resource them may also need a fresh approach. As Karen mentions, many coming out of the pandemic may be wondering how they can make a difference.

If that's you, why not volunteer with BRF? We greatly value our growing team of volunteers and are developing ways to support them more. From praying to practical involvement, we have a place for all kinds of volunteers. To find out more, contact [jane.butcher@brf.org.uk](mailto:jane.butcher@brf.org.uk).

Find out more about volunteering at BRF at [brf.org.uk/volunteer](https://brf.org.uk/volunteer)

*'The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding.'*  
*Nehemiah 2:20*



# Hello from Julie



Julie MacNaughton,  
head of fundraising

My sincere thanks to all those who have supported BRF's ministry in recent times by giving a donation, purchasing our greetings cards and praying for us. I never fail to be amazed by the generosity of our donors and friends who help make all we do possible.

Please continue to hold us up in your prayers – especially for the success of our annual appeal ([brf.org.uk/appeal](http://brf.org.uk/appeal)), as we seek to raise funds to deliver our ministry and provide resources which make a difference to the lives of many people. Thank you.



## A supporter's story

Many of our supporters have followed BRF for a number of years, becoming valued members of the BRF community – such as retired scientist Shirley Stapleton.

Shirley has used *New Daylight* Bible reading notes for most of her adult life. She and her late husband appreciated the fact that they didn't 'duck difficult issues, such as why bad things happen to good people', and they 'liked comparing comments from different authors'. Hoping to deepen her Bible knowledge after retirement, Shirley subscribed to *Guidelines* too.

'Reading about BRF's work made me realise how much they support all age groups,' says Shirley. She committed to giving regularly, initially to BRF's schools work, subsequently to Parenting for Faith, as 'parents need all the help they can get to teach Christian values in an increasingly secular world'.

Now Shirley is in a Bible study group 'where lessons learned from *Guidelines* have been very useful. In these difficult times I can phone a *New Daylight*-reading friend, to share how

appropriate a particular entry has been – even when it must have been penned before Covid-19. And I can contact my *Guidelines*-reading neighbour to discuss how the commentator has dealt with a recent topic.'

*'I have found that whatever one gives to BRF, be it money, prayer time or both, one receives support many times over.'*



Shirley Stapleton

## Getting involved – as an Anna Friend volunteer

Did you know that many Anna Chaplains rely on the support of volunteer Anna Friends? Julia Burton-Jones, our Anna Chaplaincy church lead, explains the difference between the two roles.

Typically, a church will commission a paid or volunteer Anna Chaplain to lead the ministry to older people, and Anna Friend volunteers to extend the possibilities for hands-on caring. It's a role that helps prevent social isolation, by offering prayer, friendship and a listening ear. Volunteers might also help with ensuring the needs of older people are met in church services. Or with delivering a service, visiting care home residents, offering home communion or running a dementia cafe.

We encourage Anna Friends to access our training. As their confidence grows, some progress to become Anna Chaplains. Others feel called to the one-to-one ministry, or can more easily

manage the lesser time commitment it requires.

Former practice nurse Sarah Griffiths is passionate about being an Anna Friend. She's involved in volunteering at dementia-friendly church services and telephone ministry. Sarah has also started a monthly 'Golden Oldies' film session, showing subtitled classics.

As Sarah says, 'It is a privilege and a joy to support and form a relationship with older people. We hope we can bring some love, joy, peace and hope into homes.'

Search for more Anna Friend stories and information at [annachaplaincy.org.uk](http://annachaplaincy.org.uk)



A cream tea made and delivered as part of an Anna Chaplaincy 'lockdown' initiative in Kent.

# ‘So good to have thoughts and ideas sparking again’

Lucy Moore, BRF’s Messy Church team leader, reports on how online Messy Masterclasses have met a huge demand for training, giving Messy Church leaders around the world a massive boost throughout the pandemic.

One of the joys of this season has been the impetus to take Messy Church training online.

Now, there’s still nothing like being face-to-face for training: delegates are free to chat, to share their ideas and experiences, to do hands-on learning and to participate fully. Online, people may lack confidence with the technology, and there are obvious constraints on how participative it can be.

But the advantages of online training are massive. It is accessible to anybody with the technology to sign up, including people with no transport and people with disabilities. People with children don’t need to worry about babysitting. There isn’t the expense of booking a venue or arranging refreshments.

The first wave of Messy Masterclasses took place between February and March, with three subjects on offer.

Unsurprisingly, the most popular has been *Reimagining your Messy Church for a changing context*, followed by *Messy Discipleship* and *Starting your Messy Church*. We plan to continue offering these, adding more topics as the months roll by.



The new Messy Church volunteer Trainers team has risen magnificently to the challenge, working with great dedication to offer as many Masterclasses as possible to the network. With huge hands-on experience of running

a Messy Church themselves, they’re leading them with great enthusiasm and skill. And according to the feedback (see right), the sessions are going down well.

Check out upcoming Messy Church events [messychurch.org.uk/upcoming-events](https://messychurch.org.uk/upcoming-events)

‘I am finding the online sessions really good. Being able to take in this from home was great.’

‘I hope they become a permanent fixture, as I feel the format worked very well. I’m looking forward to the next one.’

‘It’s so helpful to be able to think through the issues with others and to have some feedback on what has actually worked.’

‘Very grateful for the thoughtful preparation and all the contributions from leaders and participants. This second lockdown period is harder than the first, and apathy is lurking around the corner! It was so good to be jolted out of that and have thoughts and ideas sparking again. Well done the MC team and BRF!’

‘I came away from the session with joy in my heart and wanting to know more. Thank you.’



Some of the volunteer members of the Messy Church Trainers team, who have helped lead Messy Masterclasses.

Top row: Dawn Savidge, Kathy Bland, Jane Leadbetter

Bottom row: Aike Kennett-Brown, Martyn Payne, David Bland

## Messy Discipleship

Messy Church perspectives on growing faith

Edited by Lucy Moore

As research confirms Messy Church’s effectiveness in growing disciples, this timely new collection of perspectives is for anyone serious about real-life discipleship or interested in this fastest-growing fresh expression of church.

‘It’s about navigating a route through the chaos together... Like any group of hikers on a walk, discipleship comes down to not giving up, even when there are steep mountains, discomfort, blisters, confusion, darkness and mistakes in navigation.’ Lucy Moore



ISBN 978 0 85746 953 3, £8.99

# Reversing the tide

Independent research confirms that Parenting for Faith's insights and support give parents and carers new confidence and skills in nurturing faith at home. Becky Sedgwick reports.

Parenting for Faith joined BRF's family of ministries in 2016, when the Douglas Trust generously provided funding for the Vine Programme – a five-year project to develop and deliver programmes to support Christian parents to nurture faith at home. It invested in Parenting for Faith, which since then has produced a free online course, books, a well-stocked website to equip both parents/carers and churches, a lively social media presence, training events and a podcast.

## Reaching tens of thousands

Now the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) has published research (commissioned by the Douglas Trust) evaluating the impact of Vine Programme projects. It revealed dramatic growth in Parenting for Faith, with large numbers of parents, carers and churches engaging with the ministry through a raft of opportunities.

## Revitalising faith in the home

Anecdotal evidence highlighted the impact Parenting for Faith has on parents and carers and churches:

‘Parenting for Faith has been transformational for me, for how we do children’s and youthwork, for families, and for how our church talks about and pursues growing in relationship with God.’

‘My parenting has literally changed for the better. My relationship with my children has changed. My children have engaged with God because of the suggestions... I can just show them what it looks like for me to relate to God.’

‘Love their attitude of “you’ve got this”, “you are the expert in your kid”... making parenting for faith something easy to do in everyday life rather than a daunting “extra” that’s hard to fit in.’

## Authentic, connected, sustained

The report contains several conclusions highlighting the principles underpinning the ministry's success and where there is room to develop further.

### 1 God-connection and authenticity.

One of the key insights is that kids can have their own direct, unmediated relationship with God, and it is important to model authentic, rather than perfect, relationships with him.

Both these concepts are at the heart of Parenting for Faith. This is incredibly positive, indicating our fundamental approach is right.

### 2 Creating community.

Being part of a sustainable community in which parents and carers can journey together boosts impact.

We recognise that the course for parents and carers at the heart of our ministry is just a starting point. So we've developed a range of other ways for parents and carers to continue their Parenting for Faith journey: for example, monthly 'Facebook Live' webinars and the regular podcast. We also offer resources for churches looking to create communities where Parenting for Faith can flourish.

### 3 A 'long game' and a whole-church approach.

Embedding the shift from children's ministry to a church that supports parents and carers can take a long time and requires concerted effort, usually associated with the support of church leadership, deep engagement with Parenting for Faith and peers on the same pathway.



242 course groups

registered

(excludes repeat courses)



Over 86,000  
unique visitors

to [parentingforfaith.org](https://parentingforfaith.org)



3,400 downloads

of the Parenting  
for Faith course





## Professional development for children's, youth and family leaders

The Certificate in Parenting for Faith is a new course for church staff and volunteers passionate about children knowing God in everyday life.

Launched in partnership with Cliff College and written by Rachel Turner and Becky Sedgwick, the course offers twelve video-based units covering:

- the history of children's discipleship; God's plan for discipleship
- practical skills for envisioning and equipping parents and carers
- working in different settings
- culture change and your next steps.

Originally planned as a week-long course, the programme is also online. Students can simply complete the course or submit an optional assessment to receive a Cliff Certificate in Parenting for Faith.

[parentingforfaith.org/certificate](http://parentingforfaith.org/certificate)

We're committed to resourcing whole churches with a comprehensive package of resources and training (including *It Takes a Church to Raise a Parent*, *Parenting as a Church Leader* and the new Certificate in Parenting for Faith). We connect with church workers and leaders and host a range of events to encourage networking and peer engagement. These give us helpful feedback to inform next steps, as do a growing group of 'long term' Parenting for Faith churches.

4 **'Crossing the chasm'**. While we have an eager and committed group of innovative 'early adopters', we next need to attract those who want to see the benefits before getting

involved. The report also confirms our ambition to extend our reach to wider communities.

We are very aware of our current demographic and are evaluating what needs to be done to become relatable and relevant to a far broader spectrum.

Rachel Turner, BRF's Parenting for Faith pioneer, says, 'I am humbled and encouraged to read these findings. We now look forward to making Parenting for Faith more widely known in our nation and to spiritually nurture many other families in the coming years.'

Read the full report at [brf.org.uk/pff](http://brf.org.uk/pff)



2,500 views

each month of live sessions for parents and carers



1,000 plays

per podcast episode (on average)



1,700 children's, youth and family leaders

in private Facebook group



nearly 7,000 copies

of *Parenting Children for a Life of Faith* sold (includes Omnibus edition)



4,000 followers

on Facebook



# BRF daily prayer: pray with us

From Monday 17 May to Friday 25 June 2021, you're invited to be part of the BRF online community as we pray and worship together.

We'll meet each weekday at 8.45 am on YouTube and on Facebook to be guided through prayers, reflections and Bible passages with a different host each week. If you'd like to dive deeper into prayer, while journeying alongside other Christians, we encourage you to join in.

Find out more at [brf.org.uk/daily-prayer-pentecost-2021](https://brf.org.uk/daily-prayer-pentecost-2021)



'Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God...'

Where will we find the strength to rebuild our lives and communities? Olivia Warburton, our Living Faith lead, introduces Bishop Steven Croft's new book.

The word 'comfort' doesn't just mean to listen or to give someone a big hug. It means to give somebody their strength back.

Last October Steven Croft, Bishop of Oxford, invited BRF to publish a series of reflections on Isaiah 40–55 from his new podcast, developed to encourage and comfort the church at an enormously challenging time. We said yes, and in a race against the clock, *Comfortable Words* was published in late March to coincide with the anniversary of the first lockdown.

In the book Bishop Steven compares the exiles in Babylon rebuilding their lives with our current situation, and asks, 'How are we going to rebuild our lives, our churches, our society and God's world in the coming months? We are hurting and tired, and our world is hurting and tired.' Exploring Isaiah's songs of comfort and hope in nine short reflections, he addresses themes of fear and bereavement, leadership and call, and what it means to be a disciple.

'Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God...'  
These are comfortable words. We need to hear them, and the world needs to hear them.

Find out more at [thebigchurchread.co.uk/comfortable-words](https://thebigchurchread.co.uk/comfortable-words)



ISBN 978 1 80039 105 5, £7.99



## Doing the work of the kingdom – together

Pastor Andy Wade from Bradford on why his church is supporting BRF

Three weeks after my wife Lindsey and I arrived at Bierley Bethel Community Church, we went into the first lockdown. What a beginning!

The work of church is the work of the kingdom in our daily lives – a work that we do together. Churches have a duty of love and care in the lives of the people who have faithfully worshipped, given and prayed – and a duty to reach out to others in the name of Jesus.

BRF's resources come with depth of teaching and warmth of personality.

More than this, the enthusiasm and commitment of the Messy Church team are helping us to see how we can follow Jesus in reaching out in a creative, hospitable way to people who need to 'perceive God in daily existence'. We pray people will meet our patient God in a setting that warmly invites and truthfully challenges to follow.

Could your church support BRF?

Bierley Bethel Community Church has chosen to donate to BRF's Anna

Chaplaincy for Older People ministry. If you would like to talk to your church about donating to BRF, please contact [giving@brf.org.uk](mailto:giving@brf.org.uk) or go to [brf.org.uk/appeal](https://brf.org.uk/appeal).

'Jesus challenges us to open our eyes to the kingdom of God in our everyday lives and perceive God in our daily existence.'

Trystan Owain Hughes in *Opening Our Lives* (BRF, 2021)

Images: p. 1 stonemason, iStock.com/sturti; p. 2 Shirley Stapleton; p. 3 boy with CD, iStock.com/manonallard; p. 4 family on walk, Fas Khan on Unsplash; mother and child, bruno nascimento on Unsplash; pp. 3–4 icons from The Noun Project; p. 6 Andy and Lindsey Wade; all other photos © BRF.



BRF, 15 The Chambers, Vineyard, Abingdon OX14 3FE  
+44 (0)1865 319700 | [enquiries@brf.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@brf.org.uk)  
[brf.org.uk](https://brf.org.uk)



The Bible Reading Fellowship is a Registered Charity (233280)