

## REPORT OF THE COUNCIL

The Council presents its report and audited financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2021.

### Introduction from the Chief Executive

‘Extraordinary’ and ‘unprecedented’ have become rather overused terms, but they sum up the last year very well. At the start of the pandemic, we decided to continue with as much of our ministry as we could. This proved to be the right decision and we have seen over the year just how much this has been appreciated across all our ministry communities. There have been significant challenges to overcome, but also opportunities to do things differently, or for the first time. We have seen just how much it is possible to achieve, despite being a dispersed staff team throughout the year.

During the year no face-to-face training or events were possible. Most Messy Churches were unable to meet in person. Many Anna Chaplains were unable to go into care homes. Parents were under pressure, having to balance the demands of work and home-schooling during the first half of the year. Through the various lockdowns, many of us experienced the sense of loneliness and isolation that is a daily reality for so many across our nation.

Nevertheless, we’ve seen a remarkable amount of creativity both from our own staff team and also within our ministry networks, as together we’ve found new and imaginative ways to continue doing what we do and sharing these ideas widely.

Zoom and Facebook Live enabled us to reimagine and offer training, support, networking and events online across all of our ministries, making these more accessible than ever – bringing people together from the length and breadth of the UK, and from numerous other countries too. This has created a stronger than ever sense of connectedness between BRF and each of the ministry communities we serve and resource.

We’ve also been able to respond quickly to needs as they’ve arisen. We’ve adapted existing materials to make them available online and created new resources in response to the pandemic, such as downloadable ideas and materials from Messy Church and Parenting for Faith for families to use at home and a series of Carer’s Guides booklets for those working in care homes. Many of our readers have been struck by how apposite the Bible readings and reflections have been across our series, even though most were written before the pandemic began.

All of this has been made possible thanks to the extraordinary generosity of the individuals, churches and charitable trusts that have supported BRF during the year. We are so thankful for this, especially in a year that has been financially difficult for so many.

It has been a challenging and testing year, but it has also been a year in which we have seen God powerfully at work in and through BRF. Next year, 2022, sees BRF’s centenary and we look forward to all God has in store for us, giving thanks for all who work with us, support us and pray for us.

Richard Fisher  
Chief Executive

## Aims, objectives and activities

BRF's charitable objectives are to advance the Christian religion by encouraging understanding of the Bible by people of all ages and encouraging and resourcing the development of Christian life and/or ministry among people of all ages. BRF is a Christian charity that is passionate about enabling people of all ages to grow in faith and understanding of the Bible. BRF resources the spiritual journey of individuals and the mission and ministry of local churches.

### BRF's strategic priorities

BRF's strategic priorities are:

- **BRF at the centre:** making a clear link back to BRF as a whole in everything we do.
- **Maximise impact:** maximising the potential and impact of all our ministries and resources.
- **Invest in our people:** ensuring that BRF is a great place to work, developing individuals and enabling teams to play their part in seeing BRF's vision fulfilled.
- **Financial sustainability:** securing the funding we need, ensuring prudent financial management and maximising our assets.

BRF works with two key constituencies:

- **Individuals:** resourcing individuals of all ages to grow in their Christian faith and understanding of the Bible.
- **Churches:** resourcing the mission and ministry of local churches; BRF is the home of Messy Church, Parenting for Faith and Anna Chaplaincy.

## Strategic report

### Achievements and performance

#### Anna Chaplaincy – offering spiritual care in later life

*Debbie Thrower, Anna Chaplaincy pioneer, writes:*

Anna Chaplaincy is in better shape than we'd have dared hope when lockdown began. An upside of the pandemic has been Zoom's ability to keep us in touch with our network.

At first stumped by face-to-face visiting being curtailed, necessity was the mother of invention when it came to chaplains discovering new ways of maintaining contact with those they support and, indeed, with us, the core team at BRF helping to unite, motivate, up-skill and support *them*.

We now have regular Zoom Network Get-Togethers, themed workshops and online training courses. We discovered we could meet virtually over two days for our annual 'Gathering' of the network in October and still chat, laugh and weep together. The theme, 'Stories of Resilience and Hope', allowed time for lament and the airing of frustrations over the way their ministries were being thwarted, but this was soon followed by remarkable examples of Anna Chaplains finding new routes to reach older people and encourage them: from doorstep pop-rounds, recorded services on DVDs and telephone ministry, which can enable even deeper relationships to be forged, to arts projects such as the knitting of holding crosses, lovingly made literally in their thousands as gifts for those confined because of Covid-19.

Anna Chaplains found ways to support care workers and remind people experiencing acute loneliness that they're remembered and appreciated. Many of those ministering, and in the older age category themselves, have found renewed meaning and purpose helping others.

During the autumn we commissioned independent research into Anna Chaplaincy's effectiveness, as well as conducting our own network survey. Both highlighted how the majority of Anna Chaplains are sixty- to seventy-year-olds (typically, though far from exclusively, lay women), who work in myriad settings, and that 'love shines through all their interactions'.

To our surprise, there's been no shortage of new people discerning a vocation to this work and stepping forward to become Anna Chaplains. The network has increased from 146 to 163 members during the year, with an estimated 1,300 volunteers working alongside them.

National advocacy has also been boosted: we led the Church of England's weekly online service highlighting care home ministry, conducted BBC Radio 4's *Sunday Worship* to mark a year since lockdown and were asked to speak as a panel-member at the launch of the Archbishops' 'Reimagining Care' Commission. It's been a year like no other... but it's only served to heighten awareness of Anna Chaplaincy's offering of comfort, succour and hope.

### **Living Faith – resourcing your spiritual journey**

*Olivia Warburton, Living Faith lead, writes:*

2020–21 was a pivotal year for Living Faith as it transitioned into a fully defined ministry in its own right. The pandemic caused challenges, particularly with the prolonged closure of bookshops, but other opportunities arose to encourage vibrant Christian faith through the Bible, prayer and fellowship.

In the first lockdown we rapidly put together a 'spiritual resource package' for those isolated at home, and made available PDF versions of other resources with clear resonance at this time. Many churches contacted us asking to share extracts digitally with their congregations.

We pressed forward with commissioned projects, a number of which proved especially timely in the context of the pandemic. In response to the reported rise in domestic violence, we released an advance chapter from Helen Paynter's *The Bible Doesn't Tell Me So*, which speaks love and acceptance to the victims of abuse. Gordon Giles' *At Home in Advent* took on new meaning as everyone stayed at home, and saw strong sales. Many responded to Sally Welch's reflections on Ezekiel in *New Daylight* to say how relevant these were, marvelling at the fact that they were written months before we had even heard of coronavirus.

In addition to our five popular daily Bible reading notes series, we produced 26 (2020:43) new titles and 3 new editions during the year. Other highlights included the BRF Lent book *Opening Our Lives* by Trystan Owain Hughes, *Seven Sacred Spaces* by George Lings and the Parenting for Faith book *Babies and Toddlers* by Rachel Turner. At very short notice we were also able to publish *Comfortable Words* by Bishop Steven Croft to coincide with the anniversary of the first lockdown. During the year 156,265 copies of BRF publications were sold in print and digital formats.

Our Holy Habits discipleship programme broke new ground, running two successful online home groups during the year. The second of these accompanied the *Holy Habits: Following Jesus* Lent group study resource, and the related videos saw 3,000+ views on YouTube.

Living Faith authors are now writing regularly for both [brf.org.uk](http://brf.org.uk) and [brfonline.org.uk](http://brfonline.org.uk), and a new Resource Hub was created on [brf.org.uk](http://brf.org.uk) and is starting to be populated with a range of materials for churches and individuals. As part of Living Faith's new blended model of paid-for resources and free content, underpinned by funding support where required, we also secured funding for a pilot project to make nearly 1,000 copies of *The Easter Story* booklet freely available to churches.

### **Messy Church – Church, but not as you know it**

*Lucy Moore, Messy Church founder and team leader, writes:*

It has been a challenging year, when local Messy Churches have had to reimagine how to be church during lockdown. But there has still been much to give thanks for.

The support structure for Messy Church leaders has been recreated successfully. The old Regional Coordinator network was reformed into nine volunteer support teams in December 2020, to focus on needs and skills rather than on geographical areas. When Jane Butler joined the staff team as Coordinator in January 2021, she took on responsibility for the support and development of several of these teams.

The team has continued to help Messy Churches connect through Facebook Lives every Wednesday for over a year and through one-off events such as the Messy Adventure for Ascension Day 2020. A new group of teenage Messy Church leaders has met regularly on Zoom, encouraging young leaders in the UK and Australia. The international planning group for our 2022 conference includes three young leaders.

Training has also been reinvented, with the Trainers team opening up the possibility of offering more frequent 'Messy Masterclasses' online, accessible to people anywhere in the world. The programme of three different Masterclasses (*Starting a Messy Church*, *Reimagining your Messy Church* and *Messy Church Discipleship*) has been running since January 2021. Bespoke online training has also taken place for UK and overseas participants, including a series of sessions for Swedish ministers, St Padarn's Institute, the Australian Messy Church national conference and several Fresh Expressions events.

Resources have been created to support leaders through a difficult time. First Lucy, then the Writers team, have continued to supply monthly Messy Church at Home sessions, reaching up to 30,000 people a time. In addition, Lucy contributed written and video content from Messy Church for the Fresh Expressions 'Godsend' app. *Messy Discipleship*, a *Messy Church Does Science after-school club* resource and a new edition of *Messy Nativity* were all published this year, in addition to the regular four-monthly *Get Messy!* magazine.

Developing the depth of Messy Church was a challenge under these circumstances, but the research project *A Voyage of Discovery*, funded by the Church of England and begun in 2019, was brought to a successful conclusion with the publication of the report and accompanying materials to deepen discipleship in a Messy Church context. Presentations and discussions about these valuable findings are ongoing.

### **Parenting for Faith – equipping parents to raise God-connected children and teens**

*Rachel Turner, Parenting for Faith pioneer, writes:*

For Parenting for Faith, 2020-2021 has been a year of fruit and adaption. With the onset of the first lockdown, the traditional structure of how churches and parents disciple the next generation was thrown up in the air. Churches struggled with how to keep the spiritual lives of children and young people going. Parents felt the weight of having to do not only school at home but also church. Parenting for Faith already had many online resources streams – articles and videos on the website, online Parenting for Faith courses on Zoom, Facebook Live events – and robust social media. We responded by creating new content to coach families and churches through the transition to a new way of discipleship in lockdown, highlighting how to use our online resources, and investing in a pattern of online encouragement and community.

Around the nation, many charities and organisations began to furlough their workers. However, the full Parenting for Faith team were able to continue throughout the pandemic. Therefore, we were available to partner with organisations and churches, respond to media requests, take speaking engagements and be a consistent presence nationally when many voices advocating for children, young people and families had been furloughed.

Two new Parenting for Faith books were published during the year. The first, *Parenting as a Church Leader: Helping your family thrive*, was released about a month into the first lockdown. Since then, we have run multiple online Zoom courses based on the book, walking with church leaders to consider their families in this season and long term. The second book, *Babies and Toddlers: Nurturing your child's spiritual life*, was released in February 2021. Anna Hawken took the lead in creating an online conference to launch the book, and over 350 people attended. We created a babies and toddlers bite-sized version of the Parenting for Faith course for use in toddler groups and parents' groups and some baptism and dedication prep videos. We have a steady stream of stories coming in since then of people using these resources in their local communities and churches.

We have also launched our Cliff College Certificate in Parenting for Faith, and our first cohort of 48 people began on the journey. We have created an online community for them to communicate through, and we meet with them online once a month. We are deeply encouraged at seeing leaders fully grasp the principles of Parenting for Faith and use them across multiple countries around the world.

## **Barnabas in Schools**

As mentioned in our Annual Report last year, we announced the difficult decision in July 2020 to draw our Barnabas in Schools programme to a close after 20 years of working with primary schools. We give thanks for the 500,000 plus children that were able to experience a Barnabas RE Day during this period and for the individuals, churches and charitable trusts whose generous support made this programme possible over the years. During the year some of the key online educational resources from Barnabas in Schools were moved across to the Resource Hub on the BRF website so that these continue to be available.

## **Planned activities**

Our plans for 2020–2021, as set out in our last Annual Report, included the following:

- Launch a new website for brf.org.uk
- Develop online training opportunities across the ministries
- Expand the range of opportunities for volunteer involvement with BRF's ministries
- Centenary (2022) planning and preparation
- Commence charity-wide data and website integration
- Replace and upgrade BRF's IT servers

Most of the above have already been commented upon. For the other points, these are set out below.

### ***Website***

The new website was launched in May 2020 and connects all the ministries of BRF. It also shares stories each week from a variety of different contributors. The website incorporates a Resource Hub through which we continue to make available key Barnabas in Schools resources, following the closure of the programme, as well as a wide range of ideas to resource children's ministry in churches.

### ***Volunteers***

During the year BRF appointed a Volunteer Advocate Lead. She has started the process of recruiting and supporting a team of volunteers who will promote the work of BRF and its ministries within their churches and communities.

### ***Centenary 2022***

Many plans have been made for the celebration in 2022. These include publication of a range of limited-edition 'Centenary Classics' hardback books and an online service of celebration and thanksgiving. Former editor of *New Daylight*, Sally Welch, will write the Advent and Lent books for the centenary year. A commemorative rose will also be available to purchase.

### ***Data and website integration***

During the year it was determined that in order to carry out this work, further project management capacity was required. Internal promotion enabled that to happen and the project will now commence in the coming year.

### ***IT servers***

The servers were replaced as planned during the year. The increase in demand for electronic and online working arrangements has further increased the demand on these assets.

## **Plans for future periods**

BRF plans to continue with the activities outlined above, subject to securing the funding necessary. Particular developments for the coming year include:

- Celebrate BRF's centenary (2022)
- Commence charity-wide data and website integration
- Refine and expand online training across the ministries
- Develop volunteer local church champions
- Develop impact measurement
- Create and launch 'Messy Church goes Wild'