



Celebrating 100 years of BRF



On this major milestone, **Bishop Colin Fletcher**, chair of our Board of Trustees, looks back to where it all began.

2022 is a big year in the life of BRF. It was a century ago that Revd Leslie Mannering founded 'The

Fellowship of St Matthew' at his parish in Brixton, South London. Its aim was simple. 'We need', he wrote 'to get back to the fundamentals of our faith' (by which he meant prayer, Bible reading and Holy Communion), to meet the spiritual needs of his parishioners. To assist with this he began to produce a monthly leaflet with daily readings from St Matthew's gospel, brief explanatory notes on each of them and subjects for daily prayer.



Revd Leslie Mannering

Seeing God at work

Since then, the Bible notes aspect of our ministry has lessened, as Bible reading, along with church attendance, has diminished in this country. What has not changed, however, is the experience in BRF of seeing God at work in unexpected and dynamic ways. If you read 'The BRF Story', written for our 80th Anniversary, you will find no references to Messy Church, Anna Chaplaincy, or Parenting for Faith, for the simple reason that none of them existed 20 years ago. Today, along with Living Faith, which still very much reflects the vision of

Leslie Mannering, they form our four key ministries, and all of them have grown exponentially to serve God's church in different ways in different parts of his world.

'Fulfilling people's spiritual needs remains central to our vision.'

Given the history of BRF it would be unwise of me to predict what will happen over the next few decades, but what I am certain about is that fulfilling people's spiritual needs remains central to our vision, and with your support God may well have a few more surprises in store.

Find out how to get involved in our centenary celebrations at brf.org.uk/centenary

From 'acorn' to 'oak'

The response was astonishing. By the end of January 1922, 100 had signed up, and that number had nearly doubled by the close of that year. A further 100 subscribers were added in 1923 and by now other parishes across the country had asked for the notes for themselves. By early 1929 there were over 20,000 subscribers and that number increased to 58,000 by 1931. The adage that 'mighty oaks from little acorns grow' was certainly true of those early days of The Bible Reading Fellowship (the name that had been adopted as the Fellowship outgrew its Brixton roots a few years earlier). By the 1950s, when I was first introduced to BRF, the circulation of the various notes had topped half a million.

'For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.' PSALM 100:5



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A year to celebrate!

This year there'll be opportunities to celebrate and give thanks for 100 years of BRF. We hope you'll be able to join in.

23 January: All being well, the BBC's much-loved Sunday programme, *Songs of Praise*, will feature BRF's centenary.

24 April: Join our online **Celebration of Thanksgiving** with act of rededication. Premiering at 3.00 pm on YouTube, the service is led by Bishop Colin Fletcher, chair of the BRF Council, with Canon Dr George Lings preaching.

20-22 May: The third **Messy Church International Conference** welcomes national, regional and local Messy Church leaders from around the world, to explore how to make a difference to church, community and the planet; with Dr Paula Gooder speaking. **Find out more at messychurch.org.uk/mcic22**

9 July: BRF and the Diocese of Oxford host the 25th annual **Festival of Prayer** in the delightfully located Ripon College, Cuddesdon. Speakers include Dr Gemma Simmonds CJ (keynote), Revd Joanna Gallant, David Cole, Ann Persson, Bishop Colin Fletcher and Tony Phelan.



Hello from Julie and the fundraising team

Thank you very much to everyone who donated through The Big Give Christmas Challenge in aid of Anna Chaplaincy, bought our Christmas cards and gift wrap and made donations last year. Here are some ways you can continue to support us in 2022.

BRF Centenary Rose

Many of you have told us how much you have enjoyed giving and receiving the BRF Centenary Rose. These are still available to order – please see the enclosed leaflet. We look forward to seeing them in bloom – do share any photos on social media and don't forget to tag us!

Facebook @brfcharity | Twitter @brfonline | Instagram @brfcharity

New Easter and Everyday cards

We have extended our range of Easter and Everyday cards for 2022, so if you're planning on sending Easter greetings, birthday cards or just a note to say 'thinking of you', we have designs to suit every occasion. Buying these cards is a great way to support our work.



Get fit – get fundraising!

If you're giving or taking something up as a new year's resolution, why not consider using this as an opportunity to fundraise for BRF whilst keeping yourself motivated? If you dance, run, skip, hop or cycle in the new year, could you ask friends to sponsor you in aid of BRF? Please contact our fundraising team (details below) for sponsorship forms – and so we can cheer you on!

Every penny counts

Another fantastic way to raise funds for us – at no cost to yourself – is to use Give as You Live and Amazon Smile when you shop online – whether it's a special purchase or even your regular grocery shopping.



Contact our fundraising team at giving@brf.org.uk, call us on 01235 462305, or drop us a line at the address on the back page.

The theme of our centenary year is **Sharing the story**: the story of BRF, the Bible story at the heart of the organisation since its earliest days and the stories of some of our longest-standing readers, supporters and volunteers: people like June, Beryl, Eileen, Hazel and John...



The Holy Spirit's hand at work

92-year-old June Foster remembers reading 'the lesson' at the BRF Festival in St Paul's Cathedral in 1959, as a student nurse.

I was one of four people representing the different BRF Bible reading notes. I read a lovely passage: Isaiah 55:6–13. 'Seek ye the Lord while he may be found.' (v. 6).

I had to wear 'indoor uniform', which was virtually unheard of: you only ever wore it inside the hospital, but I had special permission to wear my pink and white striped dress, apron and cap, all heavily starched, and my navy blue cloak. Matron ordered a taxi to take me to St Paul's where I was met by a steward, who took me to my seat and told me what to do.

The Queen Mother was Patron of BRF at the time of the Festival in 1959 and a message from her was read out in the course of the service. Today's Queen was born in 1926, so she's three years older than me – so as long as she keeps going, I'll keep going!

I've subscribed to *Guidelines* Bible study notes for many years... I appreciate new ways of interpreting the teaching. I am aware the notes have been prepared a year or more before I am reading them and with world events moving so fast these days it is amazing how the readings relate to what is going on. I guess the Holy Spirit has a hand in it!

'It is amazing how the readings relate to what is going on.'



A royal seal of approval

Now in her 80s, **Beryl Fudge** has been a fan of BRF's Bible reading notes since childhood. As a teenager in post-war Britain, she attended a very special event with her mother...

My parents always took BRF's Bible reading notes, and as soon as I was old enough to read I had the children's notes. I read those for many years before going on to the adult notes. I attended BRF's 25th anniversary service with my mother. Westminster Central Hall was absolutely packed and we were down in the basement. The Queen Mother and Princess Margaret were both there and at one point they came down to the basement and walked through, speaking to people down there. I don't remember much of the detail – I was only about 14 at the time but, as I've said, I was already reading BRF Bible reading notes and have been reading them ever since.

I've found them so useful. I've always handed them on to others and organised group subscriptions and Bible reading groups in whatever church I've been in.

'The Queen Mother and Princess Margaret... came down to the basement and walked through, speaking to people.'



An archive to inspire across the years

Canadian **Eileen Herman's** story evokes memories of old Hollywood films. Times were hard and resources precious – including Eileen's BRF Bible reading notes, which she's kept for over half a century!

Our rural church was built in 1898. Where we lived there was no snow-removal from the roads, so there were no services in the winter, nor in the spring, due to muddy roads. Since there was no Sunday School, I was enrolled in the Sunday School By Post, until I graduated from high school and began attending teachers' college in the city.

A volunteer in charge of the Sunday School By Post gave me a year's subscription to BRF notes. At the end of the year, I began renewing the subscription myself – and when BRF offered life-time subscriptions, I took advantage of the offer.

After teaching for five years, I married a farmer. During the first years of our marriage we lived in an 8' x 24' trailer, as we moved from place to place so my husband could work on road construction to earn money to buy our farm. We lived in trailers until our farm was paid for, and then moved into the farmhouse, shortly before our fifth child was born.

There was no room in our trailers to store back copies of BRF notes, but shortly after we moved into our farmhouse in 1968 I started saving them. I soon realised that if I wanted to refer to them I needed to make an index of where to find the notes referring to various passages in the Bible. I made an index of those that I had saved since the mid-1970s – to which I add at the end of each year. Now I can easily refer to notes from the past 40 years or more.

'I made an index of those I had saved since the mid 1970s... Now I can easily refer to notes from the past 40 years or more.'



Sharing a gift

Retired teacher **Hazel V. Thompson** was widowed seven years ago after 55 years of happy marriage to Ralph, a Wesleyan Reform Union minister. She has two sons and two grandchildren. She's had a long-standing interest in writing and since 2006 has had a number of meditations accepted for *The Upper Room*.

I first became aware of BRF when my husband and I, newly retired, led [the Alpha course] in the church we joined after moving to a new area. I picked up a copy of BRF's *The Upper Room* from a display of Bible study notes and devotionals.

Browsing through it I discovered it was written by readers from many countries, and as I saw there was an opportunity to use my own writing, in due course I submitted my first meditation. In the almost 20 years since then a good proportion of my efforts have been accepted for publication – including one today!

I am greatly encouraged by the new BRF Prayer Diary, both in my own devotional times and for wider use. During the shutdowns of the Covid pandemic the Lord led me to write a weekly reflection for people who were isolated. I sent it to friends in different churches across the country and many of them circulated it to others within their own fellowship. I found the prayers and quotations were often exactly what I needed to slot in with the theme and spoke powerfully to many of the readers.

I congratulate you on your centenary. May the work of God's kingdom continue to be spread far and wide by your resources, for many years ahead. Thank you for the many benefits I experience myself through them.

‘I saw there was an opportunity to use my own writing.’

God provides a leader

Retired Bishop of Tewkesbury and former chair of BRF's Executive Committee in the 1990s, **John Went**, recalls meeting a certain young man whose life's work was to be inextricably bound with BRF.

I hadn't been linked with BRF for very long when it was clear that unless something fairly dramatic happened there would be no BRF into the 21st century!

A certain young man, who was considering the possibility of ordination in the Church of England, had been brought in by the chairman of the Council, to work for a year alongside the director. This young man had many bright ideas about ways in which BRF could be developed. His name was Richard Fisher!

It has been an enormous privilege over the past 25 plus years to see the ways in which under Richard's leadership BRF has blossomed and flourished, and developed an enormous range of resources to foster Christian discipleship, ministry and mission at so many different levels.

Alongside other daily engagement with the Bible, I still value using *New Daylight* and *Guidelines* each morning and dipping of an evening into *Bible Reflections for Older People*. Again and again my heart is warmed and I am challenged by the biblical reflections offered by a rich variety of individuals.

I praise God for the ministry of BRF. The story over the past 25 years could have been very different and I praise God for guiding Richard to move on from thoughts of ordination to a life-time's calling to head up BRF, and to draw round him over the past 25 years an outstanding team without whom nothing of what has been achieved over his time as chief executive could have taken place.



‘This young man had many bright ideas.’

For more centenary news go to brf.org.uk/centenary



Doing church differently



Karen Tullett, a Certificate in Parenting for Faith student, is an experienced children's work leader and church planter. She says Parenting for Faith's radically different approach to families ministry can help form an intergenerational church made up of 'real people doing real life together'.

I was introduced to Parenting for Faith when I co-led the eight-week course (online) for my church network during lockdown. When I heard there was an accredited Parenting for Faith certificate, I jumped at the chance to dive deeper into the amazing content. Working through the weekly sessions gave me an opportunity to think theologically and reflect practically on how I approach church. I began to envision what an intergenerational family of believers might actually look like: continual dialogue and relationships across generations, outside of official gatherings – real people doing real life together.

The course was full of practical tools I can use to enable, equip and empower parents, carers and families to disciple well within the home. This alternative approach is countercultural to the usual 'follow the expert' model, which relies on programmes and age-specific groups, with a designated leader carrying the burden of responsibility. Parenting for Faith gives responsibility back to parents and carers – encouraged by the leader.

It's been a thrill to invest what I've learned into the church planting team I serve alongside here in Port Glasgow, as we seek to build an intergenerational family of disciples who make disciples.

For details of the certificate course, go to parentingforfaith.org/certificate



Make sleep issues a thing of the past

Sleep problems are common among children, so how can we reassure them God is still looking after them at night-time?

Families can help children find peace and rest by exploring together biblical stories about night-time, in Rachel Turner's *Comfort in the Darkness*. Now groups can get together online or in person to read and discuss this helpful book, with video input from the author, through **The Big Church Read**.



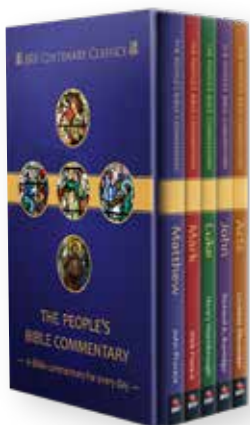
Find out more at thebigchurchread.co.uk/comfort-in-the-darkness

BRF favourites to enjoy and to give

To celebrate this landmark year, there's a chance to buy special centenary editions of some of our most popular books. **Olivia Warburton**, Living Faith lead, presents the first of them.

Centenary classics

BRF's story began in 1922 when Revd Leslie Mannering developed Bible reading notes to help his congregation 'get a move on' spiritually. One hundred years on, BRF is still all about helping people to understand the Bible and apply it to everyday life. As part of our centenary celebrations we're launching the *BRF Centenary Classics* range of well-loved titles from past years, sharing their stories again with a new audience.



Boxed set for Bible-based living

In April comes a commemorative limited edition set of five volumes from our influential *People's Bible Commentary* series, unwrapping scholarly insights to provide food for thought and inspiration to live by. Currently only available as PDF downloads, we look forward to making the commentaries

on the gospels and Acts more widely available once more. Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, each set is offered at a subsidised price of £39.99, £10 of which goes to support the work of BRF.

Find *The People's Bible Commentary: Gospels and Acts* at brfonline.org.uk/peoplesbiblecommentary

Later in the year you'll be able to buy luxury centenary editions of four backlist favourites – further details coming soon.

Bringing the Bible to life for children

Finally, generous donations are enabling us to make Martyn Payne's *Creative Ways to Tell a Bible Story* freely available to churches to use in their children's ministry and work with local schools. This treasure trove of ideas for exploring the Bible with children and families will also be available to purchase from June, in time for the autumn term. Perhaps you could gift one to your local church or school?

‘They kept coming and coming!’

Margaret Ottewell’s Messy Church team near Doncaster were amazed with the response when in-person services resumed in September 2021 – 18 months after the pandemic had first closed its doors.

Margaret puts the large numbers down to the team’s hard work keeping in touch with families – initially through online Facebook content, then by delivering 50 ‘Messy Church in a Bag’ to homes each month. Relationships strengthened as people deeply appreciated this regular face-to-face time on the doorstep.

The return to onsite gatherings was not without its challenges, especially in terms of safety. Fortunately the venue allowed for activities to be distributed both indoors and outdoors.



Margaret says, ‘The plan had been to give everyone their own pencil case of equipment, but these soon ran out! Some of the children seemed a little shy at first but were soon throwing themselves into everything on offer.’

With a pastoral care role on the team, Margaret firmly believes ‘we love people into the kingdom – we don’t force them.’ Her Messy Church team look forward to supporting the growing faith of those that come in the months and years ahead.

Messy Church is for all ages! Find one near you at messychurch.org.uk/messy-churches



A ‘wild adventure’!

Twelve Messy Churches across the country are piloting new environmental-themed sessions developed with the help of scientists.

Twelve exciting ‘Adventures’ exploring a diverse range of environmental topics – from weeds to weather – are being trialled by urban and rural Messy Churches between now and June. Please pray that taking their congregations outside to engage with God’s creation will be an opportunity for Messy Churches to grow the discipleship of both the teams and the families involved.

Find out about Messy Church Goes Wild at messychurch.org.uk/mcgw

A fond farewell to a true pioneer

A new season dawns for both Lucy Moore and Messy Church, the creative, pioneering ministry she founded 17 years ago.

It’s with mixed feelings that we bid goodbye to Lucy Moore, who after many years with BRF is taking up a major new role as head of the Growing Faith Foundation with the Church of England.

We are thankful for Lucy’s extraordinary contribution, not only in founding Messy Church, but also her leadership that has enabled this venture to become a worldwide movement. Begun as a local all-age initiative in Lucy’s home church, in 2006 it became part of BRF, where strategic investment enabled rapid worldwide growth as Lucy’s bold vision sparked a blaze of missional passion among Christians around the world, touching millions of lives.

While commending Lucy for her unrivalled creativity, dedication and massive heart for those on the fringes of faith, we look forward to some key milestones in 2022 for the ministry she founded: welcoming leaders to a dynamic gathering of the third Messy Church International Conference in May, developing Messy Church Goes Wild and appointing a successor, about whom you’ll read in the next issue.

‘Lucy has made an immense contribution to BRF and the wider life of the church during her time here, and we pray God’s richest blessings on her as she takes up her new role.’

Richard Fisher, BRF chief executive



‘It’s been a tremendously exciting couple of decades. Seeing God at work through local churches, helping leaders to grow teams, make disciples, work out how to be church in an imaginative way for people who wouldn’t easily join in with church: it has all been such a privilege. I’m grateful for the inspired people I’ve worked with, for the generosity of those who have supported the ministry and to BRF for enabling the work to happen.’

Lucy Moore



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