



## Welcome



On behalf of everyone at BRF Ministries, may I wish you a happy New Year. Whatever your circumstances, I pray that you will know God's deep peace and rich blessing in the months to come. It's hard to believe that by the end of this year we'll be a quarter of the way through the 'new' century. So much has happened since the feared millennium bug failed to bring the world to halt, and yet it still seems impossible that so many years have sped by.

It's been an 'interesting' time in the charity world and in the life of BRF Ministries: we've so much to give thanks for as Anna Chaplaincy, Messy Church and Parenting for Faith have joined the family and thrived, impacting the lives of hundreds and thousands of people of all ages across the world. There have been challenges too, however, particularly in the world of Christian publishing and difficult decisions along the way.

As we arrive at the threshold of 2025 we are profoundly grateful to be in good health and heart, and it is exciting to be able to share with you that we have a new chair of trustees to help guide us through whatever the future brings. As Bishop Colin Fletcher steps down from the role he has held with honour since September 2001, Mark Sheard will succeed him.

Mark had a long and distinguished commercial career before repeating his success in the charity/voluntary sector. He was CEO of World Vision UK, the world's largest international children's charity and has also been a board member and trustee of the Disasters Emergency Committee and a trustee and appointed member of the Church of England's Archbishops' Council. He is a lay leader in the parish of St John's with St James in West Ealing, a licensed lay minister in the dioceses of London and St Edmundsbury and Ipswich and also a lay canon of St Edmundsbury Cathedral.

Mark says of his new appointment: 'I am very excited to be joining the board of BRF Ministries at this time. BRF Ministries is an organisation with a wonderful heritage; I have a particular affection for the charity, counting myself among the vast number of individuals who have been blessed by BRF Ministries' daily Bible readings notes and other publications over more than a century. In recent years it has brought new and highly significant ministries to the life of the church in the UK and beyond and these ministries in turn are continuing to reveal the reality of the God's love to so many people. As I have watched the emergence and development of these ministries I have been convinced that the work of BRF Ministries should and will continue to flourish by the grace of God, and I feel very privileged to be able to play a part in that flourishing.'

It is with enormous gratitude and a sense of loss that we say goodbye to Bishop Colin, who has served BRF Ministries with energy, wisdom and humility for almost a quarter of its existence. He became a trustee in January 2001 and chair of council in September 2001. He has always been one of our most diligent and faithful advocates and it has been a real pleasure to work with him. His wise leadership of the council has been greatly valued by trustees and staff alike, as he has led us through a hugely significant period of growth and change to embrace and develop the new

### JANUARY 2025

**Messy Church international:**  
reversing Babel

**Anna Chaplaincy:**  
giving rhythm to the year

**Parenting for Faith:** keeping it real

**The Whole Easter Story**

**Sign up for our**  
**Finding Flourishing webinar**

**and more...**

## Pray with us...

In the words of this prayer for the New Year from *The BRF Book of 100 Prayers*, by Martyn Payne

*God of new beginnings,*

*God of a new heaven  
and a new earth,*

*God of new creations,*

*God of yesterday,  
today and forever,*

*we come to you to  
start again.*

*There is no better place to be.*

*Amen.*

**Our prayer resources can be  
found at [brf.org.uk/pray](http://brf.org.uk/pray)**

ministries that reflect the breadth of our work today. He will be greatly missed by us all but he leaves with our warmest thanks and good wishes for the future.

Again, a very happy New Year to you all.

**Richard Fisher, chief executive**

*But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward  
to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.*

2 PETER 3:13 (NIV)



# Hello from Julie and the fundraising team



I would like to say a heartfelt thank you to everyone who supported our winter fundraising activities –

buying and sending our Christmas cards, supporting our Christmas message or purchasing a virtual gift. Your support and generosity is much appreciated.

Now, as the year turns, we're looking forward. Inside this newsletter you will find this year's Easter and Everyday cards order form offering a range of beautiful designs from traditional to contemporary. Our full selection of cards is also available online or if you would rather speak to someone about your order, please do contact our friendly fundraising team on **01235 462305**.



It was such a blessing to read your messages in response to our Christmas Message Appeal. These were a source of real encouragement to our staff, and I thank you for taking the time to fill in the cards and also for your prayers.

As we start a new year and prepare the fundraising activities that lie ahead, I am focusing on the theme of 'gladness and generosity', as highlighted in our popular Holy Habits resources. I hope that with your help we are able to raise the funds to continue providing resources free

of charge to churches and chaplains ministering in a variety of places of need – shelters, prisons, hospices, food banks. The letter enclosed with this newsletter explains more about this much valued initiative.

We need to raise £1.2 million this financial year to fund our ministries – Anna Chaplaincy, Living Faith, Messy Church and Parenting for Faith. We are completely reliant upon fundraising and gifts in wills to achieve this. If you would like to make a donation to support any of our ministries, or become a regular giver, please do contact us. We couldn't do our work without you!

Again, my sincere thanks for all your support and prayers.

Every blessing

Julie MacNaughton, MCIOF (Dip)  
Head of fundraising

## Everyday cards

Anne in the north east got in touch to tell us that she loves using our everyday cards.

**'They're so beautiful and so reasonably priced. I love sending them to all my friends with little messages of encouragement, celebration or consolation. They're a real blessing to send and to receive.'**

**Become a regular giver: go to [brf.org.uk/friends](http://brf.org.uk/friends)**

## Meeting the mayor

As part of the celebrations of the tenth anniversary of Anna Chaplaincy joining BRF Ministries, a special evensong was held at Rochester Cathedral last autumn. Anna Chaplains, Anna Friends, staff and supporters were joined by the mayor and mayoress of Bromley, David and Ann-Marie Jefferys.



As mayor, David has selected Alzheimer's Research UK as one of his chosen charities. He and Ann-Marie are both licensed lay ministers in Rochester Diocese and Ann-Marie is a chaplain at the cathedral. Before retiring David led research and regulatory strategy for a major pharmaceutical company, developing new medicines for dementia, cancer, epilepsy and obesity. He spent 20 years as the director and CEO of the UK agency that regulates medicines and medical devices and as the government advisor on medical technology.

He took time out of an incredibly busy schedule to join training and development lead, Julia Burton-Jones, on a visit to Bromley Anna Chaplains John and Kim Curle.

'I'm trying to do the mayoralty in a slightly different way,' said David. 'So, not just raising money. I think the mayoralty is about making connections. It's about convening. So the deputy mayor and I are trying to bring people together.'

David undertook the Anna Chaplaincy module as part of his licensed lay minister training and says: 'It has been inspirational to see how many people are involved, and all coming at the issue in different ways in response to different needs and contexts. I think it's really important to keep people living with dementia rooted where they want to be rooted and part of that society. In turn, that will help to change negative attitudes to the elderly and to dementia'.





# Preparing for Lent with Anna Chaplaincy

Deacon Georgina Brooks is a Methodist minister in Rugby with responsibility for two churches as well as being Anna Chaplaincy lead in the town. Before she arrived eight years ago, the superintendent Methodist minister and a member of the Catholic Church recognised a need to develop spiritual pastoral care in the care homes of Rugby. 'What we have today,' says Georgina, 'has all grown out of the conversation that they had together. The Gift of Years group was involved in Anna Chaplaincy very early on. It's always been ecumenical: Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Evangelical... we've got everything!'

The first cohort of Anna Chaplains was already in training when Georgina arrived. The same superintendent who had helped initiate the work suggested she might be interested in it. So she went along to some of the training, just at the end of the course, to find out what it was all about. 'For me,' she says, 'it was something quite different to the ministry I'd done previously, but I had been an honorary hospital chaplain so there was an interest and I thought it was something worth exploring. I saw focusing specifically on older people as a new opportunity: something where I should push the door and see what happens.'

What happened is that the team now has 17 Anna Chaplains, supported by many more Anna Friends and works across nine different care homes. In June last year they employed a retired Baptist minister, Anthony Orr, to work two days a week as assistant lead, increasing the capacity of the team significantly.

'Across nine care homes we're touching hundreds of people's lives,' says Georgina, 'and we're not just there for the residents, we're there for residents' families and the staff as well.'

They work differently in each of the care homes, taking services, working in small groups with music, crafts or memory boxes. 'We very much listen to what the homes would like us to do. We don't impose anything and just try to keep in close touch with the managers – who can change, of course – so we're providing what they want and need.'

One of the needs care home residents often have is differentiating days and seasons. Georgina explains: 'In a care home, even though people might be coming in and out, we hear a lot from the residents that one day is the same as the next. So it's incredibly important to mark all the seasons because it helps give people a sense of rhythm to the year, and to somehow locate or relocate themselves in the year.'

'So Shrove Tuesday, Pancake Day, followed by Ash Wednesday, and then the six weeks of Lent leading up to Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Easter, help to

give shape and structure to the days. It helps people to feel part of something bigger and gives a sense of movement, of journeying, which is really important.'

'Some of the residents have been faithful worshippers for many, many years. They've grown up with Lent; they know the Holy Week journey so it's important for them to continue to experience those traditions, and whether they're living with dementia or not, it's helping them to live as best they can in a place that's maybe unfamiliar and not necessarily where they want to be.'

Georgina also finds that the symbols of Lent and Holy Week are important: tangible, visual things, like the ashes of Ash Wednesday, or maybe for some Christians, putting a purple cloth on the table during Lent, those things can be very resonant.

'And palm crosses on Palm Sunday!' she adds, 'We always give people palm crosses to hold or wave and they can keep them afterwards.'

Lent is often a time of self-reflection; and it's also a time of confession and that's really important for people who are living in care homes. It's that time of life when they are bringing things together, putting things in order; maybe they've carried the burden of guilt and regret; maybe there are relationships they want to heal... and Lent can be the right time to reflect and resolve some of those things. It can be a reminder that you can let this go, and it's okay.'





## Looking ahead to 'All together' with Crystal Goetz



**Crystal Goetz is a proud 'fifth generation Washingtonian' based in Seattle. Formerly in the music industry – 'lots of hair, lots of hairspray, lots of fun!' – she is a freelance trainer, content creator/writer and ambassador for Messy Church USA, and also heads up the children, youth and families work in Puyallup United Methodist Church, where there is a thriving Messy Church. Crystal is a passionate advocate for Messy Church and was the first international delegate to**

**sign up for 'All together', the 2025 conference to be held 20–22 June at High Leigh in Hertfordshire. Having drifted away from church after her grandmother died, she returned in her late 20s, when she had her own children.**

'I became a member of a Methodist Church and shortly after, somebody said, "You know, you should go into ministry. You're really great with the kids." And I said, "Well, that will never happen!" Ha, ha, ha. A couple years later, they weren't going to have a Christmas pageant, and I said, "Why are we not having a Christmas pageant?" And they replied, "We don't have anybody to lead it: would you like to do that?" I said, "Yes." Then they said, very matter of factly, "We're looking for somebody to do this as a job, would you be interested in applying for the job?" And I said, "No!"'

But when she came home 'God wouldn't leave it alone' and a year later Crystal became a full-time lay staff member at the church. After a few years, when she was up to her eyes in preparations for the church's vacation Bible school, a colleague suggested she went along with her to a Messy Church training session. 'It really was a stretch but eventually, I agreed. I put a group together and we went, and that was it! From that moment forward, it stunned me into this realisation: THIS is church for me.

'I can't really explain it, other than God was definitely present in the room that day and definitely saying, drop what you're doing, stop what you're doing and follow me.'

And so she did. The whole group came home inspired and enthused. 'We made a plan, and we introduced it to the church. We knew this was going to be hard for our congregation to understand at first, but we were prepared. We had been trained. We knew what to say. We read all the books and really did school ourselves in the whole Messy Church thing and about three months after the training we started our Messy Church.'

Then, about nine months after that, Roberta Egli, administrative director of Messy Church USA, invited Crystal to apply for a bursary to attend the 2019 Messy Church international conference in the UK.

When she arrived Crystal was nervous. Roberta was going to be there, but they didn't connect right away. When she got to the station there wasn't anyone else around so she steeled herself and got in a taxi.

'I got there, walked through the door and Lucy Moore just bolted for me going, "You're here! We're so glad you're here!" She hugged me, and I was thinking, wow, I've been reading about you and wanting to meet you, and here you are!'

'Then it was exponential!' Crystal says, 'It just snowballed and within a half an hour, I had 20 new friends, from Sweden and South Africa, then Canada and

Australia, and all these folks I'm talking about, I'm still in contact with them. We haven't ever stopped talking, not only about Messy Church, but life and our ministries and what we're doing.

'As far as the international Messy Church community is concerned, I think God just speaks. It's the tower of Babel story in reverse, as if God has put all of the language puzzle pieces back together again through Messy Church. I've never once in all the years I've been doing this, had anybody not get something I was saying, and vice versa. In essence, I do think that we all speak the same language. We all love God, we all love Jesus and we want to tell people about Jesus, and we can do that through the language of Messy Church!'

**Book for 'All together' at [messychurch.brf.org.uk/mcc25](https://messychurch.brf.org.uk/mcc25)**



**We are delighted to announce that BRF Ministries' Messy Church has been granted funding by the Church of England's People and Partnerships Board for an innovative outreach project that embodies our 'all ages' vision and commitment. The three-year project focuses on enabling and supporting Messy Churches across the country to grow their engagement with young people, through the piloting of new approaches both within existing Messy Churches and through new worshipping communities. These will be aimed specifically at young people beyond eleven years old who have grown up through Messy Church, encouraging them, together with their parents and carers, to grow in their Christian faith, deepen their relationship with God and their peers and to use their gifts within the church.**

**In addition, the three-year funding will enable the Messy Church team to support and mentor 300 Church of England churches, including those in recognised areas of poverty and deprivation, as they start their own Messy Churches.**



# How to 'do' Lent with children and families



Rhi O'Rourke is a pioneer curate in Leicester. She and her husband Steve, also a curate, have three teenage sons. A former children and families worker, Rhi has a long and fruitful connection with Parenting for Faith and is a member of the freelance trainers team, focusing mainly on Parenting as a Church Leader. It began ten or so years ago:

'I was looking for support in my role as a children and families worker and happened to come across some material that Rachel Turner had written, and thought, "Oh my goodness, this is absolutely fabulous!" And then I found the Forge retreat for children and families workers. I loved that and I still go on those even now, and still find it to be a source of support and challenge and equipping.'

According to Rhi, that 'equipping' was as helpful at home as at work:

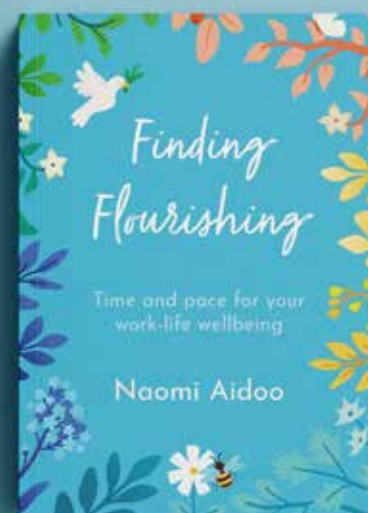
'As I was learning and teaching about Parenting for Faith, I was learning a lot about my own faith as well. For example, there's a session on unwinding wrong views of God that was incredibly relevant personally. I was brought up in a Christian home and unwinding some of what I'd absorbed was phenomenal for my own personal spiritual development, and in turn that had a huge impact for me as a Christian parent. It really equipped us as a Christian family, and that filtered down to my parenting and it filtered into my work.'

Of course, the work of Parenting for Faith continues throughout the year, and the team offers a whole variety of resources to help families engage with the church's

seasons, including Lent, Holy Week and Easter. 'It can definitely be harder to talk about Lent and Easter than Advent and Christmas,' says Rhi, 'because we've got to talk about loss. We've got to talk about grief and pain, and we've got to talk about parenting. When we're talking about families who are broken families, who are blended families, who are families who may have experienced the death of a parent or the death of a child – these are big topics. We want to be sensitive to them, but we also want to be able to tell the story. So I think the key is how we hold it all in tension and we say, yes, these are big and painful themes, but we look at them through the lens of hope and we need to be brave in telling the story.'

'Yes, there is the cross, but that is not the end. It's the end of a chapter, but it's not the end of the story because the resurrection comes after the cross. So while we're honest about the pain and grief of Good Friday, we make sure we don't just focus on the cross with our families. We really draw out the resurrection and the hope in it.'

Explore Parenting for Faith Lent and Easter resources here  
[parentingforfaith.org/l&e](https://parentingforfaith.org/l&e)



## Finding Flourishing webinar

**Wednesday 19 March 2025.  
8.00 pm (GMT).  
Tickets: £5.00 or  
£7.50 to join with a friend**

Join Naomi Aidoo for an hour of teaching and sharing based on her book *Finding Flourishing* in which she explores a Christian view of wellbeing, aiming to point people to Jesus as well as to practical tools to support their flourishing amid the pressures of life today.

Join this live event, hear Naomi speak out of wisdom and experience, and share your questions and comments.

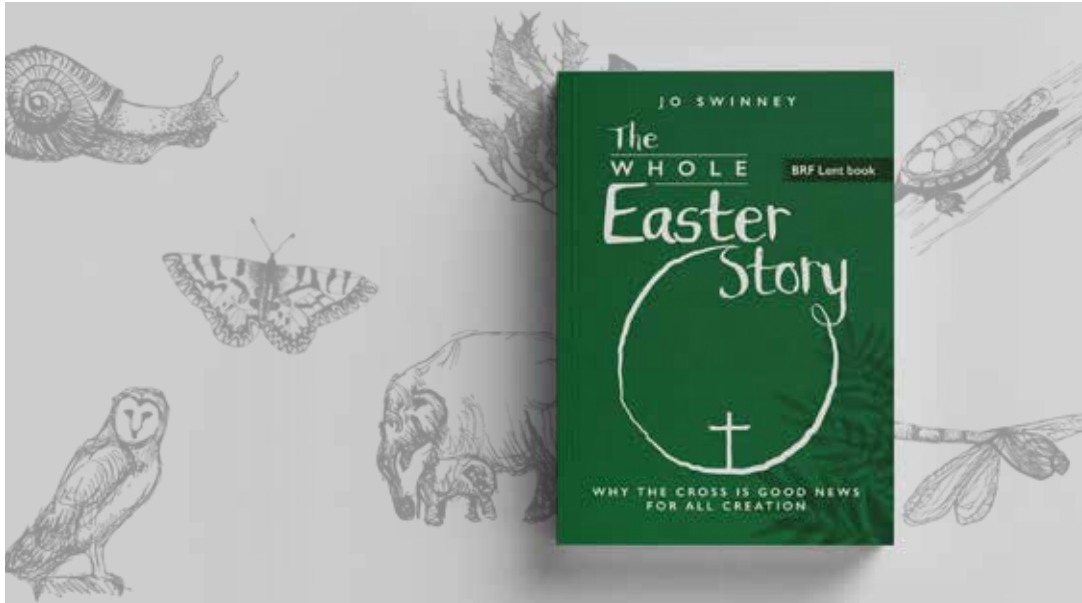
Book at [brfonline.org.uk/finding-flourishing-webinar](https://brfonline.org.uk/finding-flourishing-webinar)



## Welcome back to Anna!

We're delighted to welcome Parenting for Faith lead Anna Hawken back from maternity leave. We're praying for her and her family as they all adjust to Anna's return after nine months at home. Anna writes:

'Nine months at home with my four children has made me even more passionate about seeing every parent and carer equipped with the tools to help their kids connect with God in the normal, everyday bits of life, especially those of us that sometimes feel overwhelmed or out of our depth! I'm in the trenches with you and can't wait to rejoin the team supporting you through the podcast, courses and online events.'



Some of Jo's 40 hand-drawn illustrations to accompany her reflections. She says, 'I hope that these amateur sketches might lead to increased wonder at our creator God's magnificent ingenuity and care in bringing the cosmos into being.'

# The Whole Easter Story



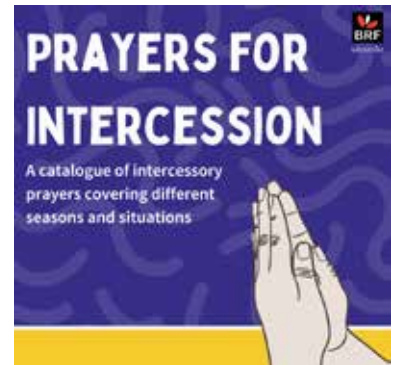
It wasn't without significant trepidation that I took on the task of writing a Lent book. The cross of Christ stands at the centre of the Christian faith and for Christians it is the pivot on which history turns. It is at the same time abhorrent in its banal cruelty and our most beautiful symbol of evil overcome. I felt incredibly daunted as I set out, and I continued to feel that way. For me, writing is always a question of doing my best to ignore that nagging sense of inadequacy and trusting that God will do his thing and make my efforts go further than they ought.

When it came to deciding on a particular angle for this book, I tried to identify something that might not have been addressed in every Lent devotional ever written. From the time I was five years old, when my parents founded the Christian nature conservation charity A Rocha, I was trained to hear throughout scripture God's love for, delight in and faithfulness to his whole creation. After the flood, God's covenant was not just with Noah and co, but with all living things (Genesis 9:1-17); Psalm 24:1 declares, 'the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it'; Colossians 1:16 tells us all things were created by and for Jesus – and on and on. I've noticed, however, that this theme is easy to miss if you aren't looking for it.

All of us tend to make the crucifixion fit our needs and narratives and sometimes this leads to distortion. As a culture, my sense is we've allowed the prevailing emphasis on individualism to shape our understanding of the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection, such that we limit it to a matter of our personal relationship with God.

I'm hoping that through this Lent, the whole story of God's redemptive purposes on the cross would captivate us and lead to a new way of living in his world, in restored relationship with him, each other and all living things.

To order go to [brfonline.org.uk/the-whole-easter-story](https://brfonline.org.uk/the-whole-easter-story)



## Intercessions on our website

Our new catalogue of intercessory prayers covers many different seasons and situations, including Lent and Mothering Sunday. They are written by Martyn Payne, BRF Ministries' volunteer prayer advocate. You can use them with your church, for Sunday intercessions, with your family and friends, for school assemblies or however suits you best.

Explore here [brf.org.uk/prayers-for-intercession](https://brf.org.uk/prayers-for-intercession)

As a charity, we rely on fundraising and gifts in wills to deliver Anna chaplaincy, Living Faith, Messy church and Parenting for Faith. Your gift helps us impact thousands of lives each year. Please support our work.

[brf.org.uk/give](https://brf.org.uk/give) +44 (0)1235 462305



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