



## Welcome



When we were planning this newsletter back in the autumn, we had in mind the themes of peace and reconciliation. Like many charities, our teams are creating resources to help people reflect on these themes as we approach the 80th anniversary of VE Day on 8 May.

Television coverage of an earlier VE

Day anniversary featured the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire and I found the images of one of the memorials – a section of track from the infamous Thai-Burma Railway, known as the ‘Railway of Death’ – particularly moving.

So, one cold, cloudless day last November, I set off to see it for myself. Other than those 30 metres of track, I had no idea what to expect. What I found was a stunningly beautiful, immaculately maintained site hosting over 400 memorials and 25,000 trees. Described as a ‘150 acre living landscape’, planting only began in 1996, on the site of an old quarry. Officially opened in 2001 the Arboretum now attracts over 300,000 visitors a year.

At its heart is the Millennium Chapel of Peace and Forgiveness, the only place in the country where an Act of Remembrance is observed daily.

From the dramatic Armed Forces Memorial, inspired in part by the ancient landscapes of prehistoric Britain, to the brightly painted carousel horse of the Showmen’s Guild of Great Britain, the hundreds of memorials pay tribute to members not only of the armed forces, but of the emergency services and civilian organisations.

I stopped first at the TOC H memorial, with its distinctive oil lamp. Originally offering a rest house for soldiers of all

ranks at Poperinge in Belgium, a few miles from Ypres, the organisation continues even today to follow its mission of healing the divisions in society by bringing people together and creating friendships between individuals.

One memorial in particular was unbearably poignant. Located on the eastern edge of the Arboretum where the dawn strikes first, ‘Shot at dawn’ consists of a larger than life-sized white statue of a young soldier, blindfolded, facing a firing squad represented by six conifers. Behind him are 309 stakes, arranged in the form of a Greek theatre. Each stake bears the name of a soldier executed for offences including desertion, cowardice and disobeying an order.

A plaque explains that today we know many of these young men were suffering from PTSD, which was not classified as a medical condition until 1980. A family campaign to pardon Harry Farr, who was shot for cowardice in 1916, went all the way to the High Court and in 2006 a posthumous pardon was finally granted to Harry and all the other men. It’s a desperately sad story with, nevertheless, a hopeful ending: an ending that shows how, as individuals and communities, we can learn and we can bring about change for the better.

The National Memorial Arboretum is a remarkable embodiment of peace, reconciliation and healing: the healing of hearts, minds and, on a site that was once scarred by decades of quarrying, the very earth that grounds us.

### MARCH 2025

Messy peace

Music and memories

Why The Forge is so special

Ignite: a new way of being church

The Everyday God book group

and more...

### Pray with us...

In the words of this specially written prayer by Martyn Payne

*God of peace,  
who raised Christ Jesus  
to victory over death,  
keep us ever mindful  
of the cost of making peace,  
of the call to be  
peacemakers,  
and of the  
carefulness needed  
to keep the peace,  
in our lives, in our land  
and in our world.*

*Amen.*

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

Go well

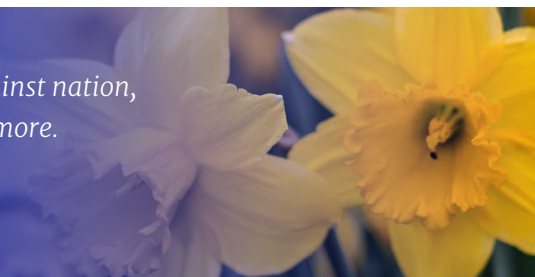
Eley McAinsh, communications officer

For BRF Ministries VE Day resources, go to our ministry websites, visit our prayer page at [brf.org.uk/prayers-for-intercession](http://brf.org.uk/prayers-for-intercession) and browse our Resource Hub at [brf.org.uk/resources](http://brf.org.uk/resources)

*He will judge between the nations  
and will settle disputes for many peoples.  
They will beat their swords into ploughshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks.*

*Nation will not take up sword against nation,  
nor will they train for war any more.*

ISAIAH 2:4 (NIV)



# Hello from Julie and the fundraising team



We are absolutely delighted with your response to our appeal in the January BRF Ministries newsletter. We asked for your support to help us give free copies of our *Holy Habits: Gladness and generosity* booklets to churches to help resource their ministry. We have had some heart-warming messages of thanks from churches who have received the books and are now using them in Bible studies and home groups.

Many of you have already bought our Easter and Everyday cards this year, and we really appreciate your support. It's not too late to order cards for Easter and our Everyday cards are always available. I enclose an order form with this mailing. You can also order online at [brfonline.org.uk/cards](http://brfonline.org.uk/cards) or you can telephone our friendly team on **01235 462305**.

## Three cheers for Mandy!

Mandy Oldroyd is a brilliant friend to BRF Ministries, selling our range of Christmas and Easter cards in her boutique – Dress 4 Less – in Lindley, Huddersfield without taking a penny from the proceeds.



## Why does she choose to help us by selling our cards?

'I've known Julie MacNaughton, head of fundraising, for many years and have learned from her about the importance of the ministries. There are a lot of Messy Churches in the local area and I have been along to one where I saw families really enjoying a meal and the activities.

'We give the prime display space to the cards and customers comment that they are great value and lovely designs. I like that they are produced in the UK and environmentally friendly. Customers at Dress 4 Less know that we support local charities in a number of ways so selling cards to support BRF Ministries is just another way for my staff and customers to help raise funds for a charity devoted to helping others.'

We send Mandy, her staff and customers our heartfelt thanks for all they're doing to support BRF Ministries this Easter.

We need to raise £1.2 million this financial year to fund our ministries and we are reliant upon fundraising and gifts in wills to achieve this. Every gift of any amount makes a big difference. If you would like to make a donation to support our ministries, or become a regular giver, please go to [brf.org.uk/donate](http://brf.org.uk/donate) or call us on **01235 462305**.

My thanks for your prayers and generous support.

*Julie*

**Julie MacNaughton, MCIOF (Dip)**  
Head of fundraising

# Welcome Mark Sheard



Chief executive Richard Fisher introduced our new chair in his welcome letter in January but we've now all had a chance to meet him since he took up the role at the beginning of the year.

To find out more about Mark Sheard, read an interview at [brf.org.uk/meet-mark-sheard-our-new-chair-part-1](http://brf.org.uk/meet-mark-sheard-our-new-chair-part-1) and [brf.org.uk/meet-mark-sheard-our-new-chair-part-2](http://brf.org.uk/meet-mark-sheard-our-new-chair-part-2)

## Easter cards

There's still time to order our lovely Easter cards. This attractively priced range includes beautiful traditional and contemporary designs, with something to appeal to everyone.



Go to [brfonline.org.uk/cards](http://brfonline.org.uk/cards) to browse the whole collection

# Music and memories



**When we were planning this issue of BRF Ministries News we decided to highlight two activities in which a number of Anna Chaplains are involved. First, the use of music and singing with the older people within their care, and second, 'remembrance' work, which aims to evoke memories, stimulate mental activity and improve well-being. This often takes place in a group and is usually assisted by props such as videos, pictures and objects. When the team suggested we contact Frances Attwood, an Anna Chaplain based in Southbourne, near Bournemouth, we discovered someone who works with both music and reminiscence in an incredibly moving and creative way.**

Frances Attwood has a background in teaching music and music therapy. Her interest in dementia came about when she was running a number of community music groups. She eventually moved into chaplaincy, 'Partly,' she explains, 'because in the music therapy profession you're not allowed to share your faith, and I felt that was the most important thing I had to offer.'

She completed her Anna Chaplaincy training in the summer of 2023 and is based at an Anglican Church in Southbourne, where she is a regular visitor to a local care home. 'I always thought I would like to take my violin in with me,' she says, 'and I've found it really useful.' Right from the beginning, she wanted to work with people who could not get out of their rooms, and that's what she does.

'I'm currently visiting a 100-year-old who is probably in the last stages of life but I always say, "Would you like me to play you something?" "Oh, yes, please!" And if that's all I do, I think it's really special. I just love being able to offer that. Then on the other end, I've been visiting somebody who probably doesn't have a personal faith, but music opens up conversation; it opens up the opportunity to talk about things in a very immediate way.'

Frances also runs a reminiscence group at a nearby United Reformed Church, where music has always been an important element in the sessions. 'We have a theme,' she explains, 'it might be work or travel or school, for example, and the songs definitely stir up memories for people. It's a lovely way of engaging them in the topic, but also just the sheer

enjoyment of singing is lovely.

'One of the things I've always found about using music is that it works at whatever level. So if somebody's nonverbal, that doesn't matter at all. They can be tapping their foot or nodding their head, or sometimes I will give them percussion instruments and they can play along. I see some people who have been completely silent for months, or even years, mouthing all the words of a song. In the reminiscence sessions, some of the family carers stay, and I feel that it's really helpful for them to see these lovely glimpses of what they've known the person to be in the past. And for people with dementia, who are losing many abilities, it's a really empowering thing to offer them, something they can still do. So it's a wonderful enabling tool. I just love using it.'

Researchers are developing their understanding of why music therapy is so powerful. They have done all sorts of scientific experiments, such as where they put sensors on different parts of the head to measure brain activity in response to different stimuli.

Frances explains: 'Different aspects of music – rhythm, harmony, melody, movement in relation to the music – affect different parts of the brain and that's why it is so powerful. Because it affects different parts of the brain, it also then stimulates other brain functions that may be fading... so yes, it's really powerful!'

**Frances is writing a new Easy Guide about using music, which will be available later in the year. Go to [annachaplaincy.org.uk/easy-guides](http://annachaplaincy.org.uk/easy-guides)**

## The Spiritual Care Series online

The Spiritual Care Series is a highly regarded, comprehensive eight-week course for individuals and churches who want to provide good quality spiritual care to older people in their local community. The course equips participants to understand the ageing process, supporting people to reconnect with their past and cope with the losses that ageing brings. It also covers the importance of good listening skills, communication and boundaries in the provision of this care.



Online Course

**The next two online courses run from 1 May – 3 July (Thursday afternoons) and from 29 September – 1 December (Monday evenings)**

Find out more at [annachaplaincy.org.uk/spiritual-care-series](http://annachaplaincy.org.uk/spiritual-care-series)

Book your place at [brfonline.org.uk/spiritual-care-series-online](http://brfonline.org.uk/spiritual-care-series-online)

Find out more about Anna Chaplaincy at [annachaplaincy.org.uk](http://annachaplaincy.org.uk)

# Messy peace



**Messy Church has produced a new resource to help people think through the themes of peace and reconciliation as our focus – both national and international – turns to the commemoration of the 80th anniversary of VE Day on 8 May 2025. It has been developed from work that Sarah Agnew – children and families advisor for the diocese of London – did in preparation for the extravaganza that was Messy Cathedral, at St Paul's Cathedral in London on 15 February.**

Sarah is uniquely qualified for the task. She was brought up in Northern Ireland in the 1990s, during the time of the Good Friday Agreement. As a passionate historian, she volunteers at the Imperial War Museum as an eyewitness in their 'We were there' programme and in her role she talks to children, young people and families about her experiences growing up.

As part of Sarah's diocesan role, she always helps out with Messy Cathedral and some of the activities on the day. Because of the VE Day commemorations in May, the 2025 Messy Cathedral focused on peace and reconciliation, which gave Sarah another idea:

'I thought, why don't I develop something that families could take home with them to use. It focuses on those words peace and reconciliation, and on identity and who you are, and how you can be a positive change.'

It was quite a challenge. 'Getting the wording right was the hardest thing, and keeping the faith element central,' says Sarah. 'I can chat about all sorts of experiences as an eyewitness, and people go off and probably forget most of it, but this was going to be written down. It felt much more permanent, so it was much more important to get the wording as right as we could. I wanted to write it in a way that's neutral, so that everyone

can engage with it and it doesn't trigger anyone. I didn't do it all on my own! I have other colleagues in the diocese who are passionate on the subject as well, and I even got my museum friends to check it too, because they're very supportive of faith being shared.'

Given Sarah's experiences growing up, and her knowledge of the history of The Troubles, what does she believe is the key to bringing peace and reconciliation?

'For me, peace and reconciliation can only happen if you bring people together and you have a conversation about it. So it's about being honest and raw, but actually believing we are all the same: we've all been made the same. Yes, we're unique in our own way and we're all born into a particular culture and identity, which is really important, but we share the same human nature at heart, and that's more important.'

In Sarah's view, the best way to demonstrate this is through personal stories and experiences. 'Hearing personal experiences is very different from reading about something that's happened in the past,' she says. 'Once a mum asked me to explain the situation in Northern Ireland to their child, who was four! I took a deep breath and said, "Have you ever fallen out with someone?" And the child said, "Yes." I went on, "Okay, have you ever said sorry?" The child

replied, "Yes." So I said, "What do you need to do to make friends again?" And the child said, "Oh, you say, sorry." I said, "Well, I've been in a situation where that's not happened and it's been very hard to make friends again."



'I find that sharing experiences like that, with people of any age, makes it's so relatable to them. By bringing my feelings into the conversation, they then think about their own feelings.'

**Download the free peace and reconciliation resource at [messychurch.brf.org.uk/latest/resources](https://messychurch.brf.org.uk/latest/resources)**



The Messy Church Conference

## All Together

20 - 22 June 2025

High Leigh Conference Centre,  
Hertfordshire

## Last call for 'All together'

Taking place from 20 to 22 June 2025 at High Leigh in Hertfordshire, 'All together' will be a conference like no other for Messy Church leaders and teams of all ages. A weekend of inspiring keynote speakers (Lorraine Prince and Sam

Richards), music by Engage Worship, informative workshops, two Messy Church sessions and fun together with the global Messy Church family.

**For further details, including ticket prices and booking details, please visit our website at [messychurch.brf.org.uk/the-messy-church-conference-2025](https://messychurch.brf.org.uk/the-messy-church-conference-2025)**

# Why The Forge is so special!

The Forge gathering is a residential retreat for local children's, youth and family leaders (both paid and voluntary) hosted by the Parenting for Faith team. It takes place twice a year and moves around the country to give as many people as possible the chance to attend. Its goal is to provide time to worship and reflect, hear about new developments in children, youth and family work, learn from each other and have fun together! We spoke to two super-enthusiastic Forge attendees, regular Caitlin Boddy and newbie Rachel Ridler, about what makes The Forge so special.

Caitlin Boddy is the primary school children's worker at St Mungo's Church in Balerno, Edinburgh. It's the church she first got involved in as a teenager, and while she 'never does anything in a normal, linear way' and swore she'd never go back when she left Balerno for university, here she is.



'Pre-COVID, I would not have travelled south to go to an event,' she says, 'partly because I'm a single mum and I had a young child, and it takes a lot of the week to go south. But when they ran it one year in Stirling, I was like, oh, that's only 45 minutes away! So I went along and after that I decided that I would travel south.'

## So what made it so special?

'It's lots of things, but spending time with people who understand the job you do is incredible! On the whole, I don't think it's a job people really understand. Even people in church, they'll say, "What's your job?" When I reply "I'm a children's worker", their follow up is, "Oh, so you run the Sunday school." If only that was all I did! The Forge lets you spend time with other people who just get it.'

Caitlin has now been to three Forges, but for Rachel Ridler, November 2024 in Norfolk was her first time. And it came at just the right time. She'd become unwell and burnt out after four or five years in her job as children's, youth and family worker at St Lawrence Church in the village of Hatfield near Doncaster.

'Like most children's and family workers, I throw everything into my work; we put so much energy and emotion into trying to reach children and families for God, we always go above and beyond, but I wasn't getting a break and I was starting

to get really poorly.'

Her diocese gave her some funding for training and she thought, 'I know what I need. I need a retreat. And that was when I heard about The Forge.' Rachel's church and line manager were very supportive and really believed that this was something that would be valuable for her. And so it was:

**'Within a couple of hours, everybody felt like good friends, and you could sit and chat to anyone.'**

'Whatever problems or issues you were going through, they were open to hearing about it and providing wisdom and praying for you. And if you just wanted to go and hide in your room that was fine. So I went for a nap a couple of days because that was what my body needed. It was just lovely to have that space to rest and refresh in whatever ways each of us needed as individuals.'

Both Caitlin and Rachel agree that the 'working groups' are the most valuable part of The Forge experience. Each participant is placed in a small group and has an hour where they 'have the floor'. They can share problems, ask for advice or ideas, or 'just have a moan'. The group gets to know each other incredibly well and for Rachel this meant the experience 'went a lot deeper than just sitting in a room and worshipping together: we were really hearing from God.'

When asked what they would say to someone hesitating about going to The Forge, Caitlin and Rachel speak with one voice:



'I would say do it!' exclaims Rachel. 'It's not selfish to have that time away. It's really valuable time. It's saying, you know what? I need this to be able to do my job really well.'

And Caitlin agrees: 'I would say, drop me an email and I'll persuade you! I really would! My colleague, who does preschool, only works officially for 12.5 hours a week, but she will go to The Forge. So that's a big sacrifice for her – most of it is on her own time – but it's totally worth it!'

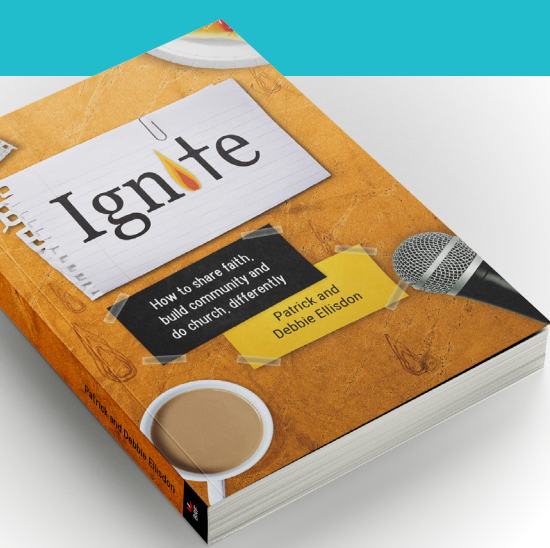


Caitlin Boddy



Rachel Ridler

The next Forge gathering takes place in May. This will be an online event, followed in September by an in person gathering in Bristol... bookings are open at [parentingforfaith.org/theforge](https://parentingforfaith.org/theforge)



**On 21 March we are delighted to be publishing *Ignite: How to***

***share faith, build community and do church, differently* by Patrick and Debbie Ellidson (pictured). Here they introduce their book: the extraordinary story behind it and the challenges of bringing that story to the page.**

We have always been keenly aware that most people who don't go to church think that Christianity is largely irrelevant and has nothing to offer them. This has been especially highlighted for us throughout our years of ministry within socially deprived communities. People were often just too busy trying to survive, let alone finding time to figure out this faith stuff! And if they ever did dare to cross a church threshold, the service often didn't deliver what they were looking for.

So, Ignite was born out of our passion to introduce Jesus to people in a way that was gentle and made sense, and wasn't hemmed in by 'churchy' words or traditions. We wanted to be real with people and somehow have honest and open conversations with them. This made us realise that what we were talking about was about being intentionally relational with people;

making friends with them, laughing and crying with them and loving them because God loves them. It meant doing community together, learning together and discovering Jesus together. Fifteen years later, Ignite is still going strong, having been planted out into seven church communities within the Canterbury Diocese.

However, doing Ignite is one thing, but writing about it... well, that's a whole other ball game! Why? Because book writing is really challenging, especially when you're doing it together. We had to figure out how to merge our writing styles (trained counsellor style and cheeky vicar style) while also trying to explain why and how we did what we did, without assuming that anyone reading the book had the same understanding and experience as we had. It had to be easily digestible, practical and make sense! Hopefully, we succeeded...

If we have succeeded in producing a readable book about Ignite and how to do it, then our hope is that people will be inspired to give it a go themselves, creating intentional friendships, gently sharing the good news and growing their own Ignite community, where everyone is welcome.

Which, if you think about it, is pretty much what Jesus did...

**Find out more about Ignite – the pioneering café-style church for those on the margins – at [brfonline.org.uk/ignite](http://brfonline.org.uk/ignite)**

## The Everyday God book group

**A small but devoted group meets fortnightly in Marcham to study a Christian book together. There are currently five members – Rosemary, Ann, Catherine, Chris and Elizabeth – and they've been reading Jonathan Arnold's *The Everyday God* together for several months. It was Chris who told us**

**about the group, and their enthusiasm for the book:**

'After we'd had the first session I just thought it's amazing what there is in this book, and it only costs £9.99. I've got a finance background! I think of the amount of work that's gone into it. There's so much deep thinking and that stimulates us to think much more deeply on these questions of social justice.'

Rosemary leads the group and suggests books they might enjoy: 'I thought this book would suit us really well. The themes of justice and mercy, and the musical metaphor that runs through the whole book, the stories and Ghislaine Howard's extraordinary art. Like most groups we like to go off on a tangent a lot so the option to vary the length of sessions was appealing. We don't have much time together but you can go home and read the stories and reflect and go deeper.'



For Elizabeth, an artist, the musical thread is captivating. For Catherine, a librarian, it's the practical examples that are especially helpful: 'Sometimes you can have books that are amazing theologically but you need to explore the practical implications for people's day-to-day lives. I like that Jonathan uses examples where things go wrong, because we just are fumbling our way through life, aren't we, so the honesty about the ups and the downs, along with the music makes this book very unusual and quite special.'

**Find out more at [brfonline.org.uk/the-everyday-god](http://brfonline.org.uk/the-everyday-god)**

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



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p. 2 – Mandy Oldroyd in her boutique by kind permission of herself; p. 3 – Frances Attwood and Frances singing with her group by kind permission of herself; p. 4 – Sarah Agnew by kind permission of herself from Imperial War Museum;  
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