

News & Updates

Inspiring people of all ages to grow in Christian faith



Welcome



We are approaching Advent - a time of great hope - and I am coming to the end of my first year as chair of BRF Ministries.

One of our major tasks this year has been to set a strategy for the organisation for at least the next

three years. It is built upon three simple clear goals: to ensure the organisation is sustainable; to extend our reach across all ages and geographies; and to deepen our impact so that those we reach are drawn ever closer to Jesus. It's not always easy to measure our achievements against these goals, but one of the most helpful measures we find is not a column of figures but individual stories: stories of families discovering Jesus through Messy Church, stories of parents and grandparents seeing children they care for grow in faith through Parenting for Faith, and stories of those in later years experiencing spiritual care through Anna Chaplains. Our ministry is truly intergenerational.

As I reflected on the intergenerational nature of our ministry I was reminded of Psalm 145, which speaks of the faith of successive generations:

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise;

his greatness no one can fathom. One generation commends your works to another;

they tell of your mighty acts.

PSALM 145:3-4 (NIV)

How wonderful the psalmist's descriptions of God are, culminating in a declaration of his 'abundant goodness' in verse seven. As you can read in this newsletter, we have been blessed to experience God lavishing his abundant

goodness on us over the last year.

I have previously expressed my confidence that God has not finished with BRF Ministries yet and has much for us still to do. As I have seen God lavishing his 'abundant goodness' on us over the last year my confidence in God's plans for us has only grown. So, as we go into Advent, I look forward with hope - hope in our 'God with us', and hope that 'will never disappoint us, because God has poured out his love... through the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to us' (Romans 5:5, NCV).

I pray you will enjoy a hope-filled Advent.

Mark Sheard Chair of BRF Ministries

Pray with us...

In the words of this prayer from our 2025 Advent book, Donkey Roads and Camel Tracks, by Gemma Simmonds

Loving God, as we set out on our Advent journey, fill our hearts with the desire to walk in your paths and learn your ways. Give us the grace we need to build relationships of peace and reconciliation, one step at a time.

brfonline.org.uk/donkeyroads-and-camel-treks

Our prayer resources can be found at brf.org.uk/pray

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and more...

The Charles Plater Trust grant to Anna Chaplaincy



We are thrilled that The Charles Plater Trust has awarded Anna Chaplaincy a generous grant to further training and development. The Charles Plater Trust is a significant grant-making charity focused upon Catholic social teaching and supports a wide range of social action projects across the UK. Earlier this year our head of marketing and engagement, Karen Laister, and Anna Chaplaincy lead, Debbie Ducille, attended the awards ceremony in Cardiff, followed by Mass in the Metropolitan Cathedral of St David, and enjoyed a 'truly inspiring and enriching day'. BRF Ministries and the Anna Chaplaincy team are deeply grateful to all at the Charles Plater Trust for this generous award and the ongoing support that they provide.

Hello from Julie and the fundraising team



This year's range of Christmas cards is selling well, thanks to you, our faithful supporters. We're grateful to everyone who has already placed an order and, for anyone who hasn't quite got round to it yet, they are still available. You can order online at **brfonline.org.uk/cards** or contact our team in the office on **01235 462305**.

Our sincere thanks also

go to everyone who chose to make or update their will during October's Make a Will Month and included a gift for BRF Ministries. Gifts in wills are much appreciated, and we are very touched by supporters who choose to help us in this way.

Regular monthly gifts are also very important to us and you can become a Friend of our ministry by making a monthly gift of just £2 or more. As I write, we are on track to reach the exciting milestone of 600 Friends by Christmas, and I have been so encouraged by messages we've received from Friends in recent months. Jane from Yorkshire said: 'I decided to become a Friend of BRF Ministries and I give £5 per month. I know from the website and reading the newsletters that the regular gifts make a big difference so I am happy to help in this way.'

If you would like to support us by becoming a Friend, visit our website or

contact the office for details, or have a look at the Friends leaflet enclosed with this mailing.

We have been blessed in recent months with some generous grants from charitable trusts and foundations. Pressure on trust funds is acute in these challenging times and a huge amount of work and prayer goes into these funding bids. We greatly value the opportunity to build relationships with these generous funders, including the Charles Plater Trust whose award features on the front page of this newsletter.

As always, I send grateful thanks for your prayers and every gift we receive during what is a very financially challenging time for many of us.

With very best wishes

Julie

Julie MacNaughton, MCIOF (Dip) Head of fundraising























Every year we send a little 'thank you' gift to our Friends (regular givers) to let them know how much we appreciate their support. This year the gift was a specially commissioned notebook and we received lots of lovely messages from Friends across the country, including a letter from a 93-year-old Friend in the Midlands who was first introduced to BRF Ministries by her mother.

'She must have been one of the earliest readers of BRF's Bible reading notes because I've been familiar with them since my childhood. I've also been using the notes on and off (mostly "on") throughout my life.'

Our reader shared that she's already using her notebook as a 'commonplace' book, to record quotes and images which speak to her. She subscribes to New Daylight, purchases our books and Christmas cards, and gives a regular monthly donation to support our work. But above all, she prays for us, writing...

'I am thrilled and delighted to be alongside and to pray for the many aspects of BRF Ministries and all those involved in them.'

Could you join her? brf.org.uk/friends

If you would like to make a donation to help support our work you can do so online at **brf.org.uk/donate**, post a cheque made payable to BRF or call our friendly team on **01235 462305**.



A ministry of hope



It's an interesting fact that only ten percent of our 450 Anna Chaplains are men, so we're profiling one of this rare breed, James Reeve, to inspire others to follow in his footsteps. James is a mental health nurse by background and he and his wife have spent time as missionaries in India and in the Philippines. They belong to the Elim Pentecostal Church in Stafford and that is where James is licensed to serve as an Anna Chaplain. What prompted his move into ministry with older people?

'I guess seeing our parents getting older was part of it, but it was more the fact that we invest so much in children's and youth work but most churches don't invest much time and resources in older people. That thought weighed on my heart and when we went to the Elim Leaders Summit in May 2023, Debbie Ducille - the Anna Chaplaincy lead was there. Since we got back from the Philippines, I'd been praying, "What do you want me to do God?" I wanted to serve in some way and have a ministry, and when I saw Debbie's session in the programme I thought I'm going to go to that. We went along and I think God had already prepared my heart to hear what Debbie had to say.'

Things moved quickly and soon James began his Anna Chaplaincy training. While he was training he contacted the Christian network 'Love Stafford' to ask what they were doing for older people. That contact led to him to become a regular visitor to the Brooklands retirement complex, where residents had recently lost their chaplain. 'They'd organised quite a lot themselves, carrying on the pattern the former chaplain followed, and we were asked to take over leading a monthly fun, fellowship and discussion evening, which people really enjoy.'

James is Stafford's first Anna Chaplain and he's looking to recruit some Anna Friends to help expand the work. 'I see so much that we could be doing if we could encourage more people to get involved. There's already some interest, but it's still early days.'

Despite the small beginnings, James finds his work with older people incredibly rewarding.

'I love journeying with people; just spending time with them and listening to their stories is so interesting. With communal living, perhaps they wouldn't necessarily choose to be friends with all these people, but they're all thrown together and it's so interesting and inspiring to discover different people's perspectives and experiences of life.'

A lot of the conversations James has with older people come round to their feelings of loss. 'They're losing the things that have defined them: the roles, relationships and activities that gave them their identity, and they often feel unseen and ignored.' And yet his ministry with older people is anything but sad and hopeless.



'People are getting older, but that doesn't mean they're not able to serve anymore or that they can't find new meaning and purpose at this stage of life. By listening, being present, we're giving them the opportunity to look at what they can do. I've never felt it a hopeless ministry at all. I get such a lot of joy and I think the people we spend time with also get a lot of joy out of the conversations or even in just sitting quietly without talking. And we have a lot of fun, in the various activities as well as in the conversations.'

Advent and Christmas is a great time in the retirement living complex. Last year there was a carol service and it was the best attended event they've had, and that was so encouraging for James. 'Even people who aren't interested the rest of the year, it's still that opportunity to share the hope we Christians have at Christmas. Of course it's not just Christmas, the hope continues afterwards, but if they only come to one thing in the year, it's a really important message.'



24 Hour pilgrimage raises over **£12,600** for Anna Chaplaincy

On 20 and 21 September, PR executive Neil Bennett made a 24-hour pilgrimage to raise awareness of our Anna Chaplaincy ministry to older people. He followed the 39-mile Peak Pilgrimage route from Ilam to Eyam, through Derbyshire's southern Peak District. Covering 25 miles in appalling weather on the Saturday, tracks became streams and the going was tough.

The first day ended at dusk in Bakewell with a welcome change into dry clothes and a few hours rest before, thankfully, Sunday dawned bright and clear. Neil ran the nine miles to St Anne's, Baslow in glorious sunshine and arrived for the morning service and a small family celebration in the church in which he and his wife were married. Then it was back on the trail to complete his run at Eyam parish church, where Anna Chaplaincy lead Debbie Ducille and her husband Brian were there to thank him for all he'd done to raise money and awareness for Anna Chaplaincy.

Neil said after his run:

'This was an absolutely unforgettable, moving and deeply spiritual journey that I will remember for the rest of my days.

'I have so many memories – of trial and turbulence, yes (just as in life, there were times when I doubted myself and the whole venture), but mostly of love and fellowship – to treasure. It has all been truly life affirming.'

We are so grateful to Neil for his amazing generosity in putting himself through such a gruelling challenge and for raising the fantastic amount of £12,608 as we go to press.

Could you do something to raise funds for BRF Ministries? Go to brf.org.uk/give/fundraise

Messy hope



Lis Telcs is the children and family's minister at St Nicholas Church in Saltdean near Brighton, a highly inclusive

and warmly welcoming Anglo-Catholic congregation. You can look them up on achurchnearyou.com. Lis recently contacted the Messy Church support team to ask them to pray for a very special occasion: Holly and daughter Lily had asked to be baptised in a Messy Church celebration. With their kind permission, Lis shares their story.

'Holly began coming to our weekly stay and play group which we set up three years ago when a parent in the congregation who had her second child during lockdown said she felt very bereft of adult company and felt her child had missed out on being with other children.'

A year later, after being captivated by the Messy Church vision at a training day led by Messy Church lead Aike Kennett-Brown, Lis started a Messy Church at St Nicholas. Soon a trickle of stay and play people began going to Messy Church as well and it wasn't long before Holly and three-year-old Lily joined them.

'Holly was quite isolated. She doesn't have a lot to do with her family anymore and when she started coming along to stay and play and then Messy Church, she found a lot of support. Sharing food is always part of the Messy Church welcome and for Holly that's been really helpful. She lives with a number of chronic illnesses which means she can't work and sometimes depends on the local food bank. So she's found the practical support really wonderful, as well as the friendships and the company for herself and Lily. Sharing a meal at the beginning of Messy Church is a real experience of 'family' and Holly said in her testimony that she's found Messy Church so welcoming, she's not just made friends but found a family for herself and Lily.'

Holly wasn't baptised as a child and always wondered why not. As she got more involved in Messy Church it was something she really wanted to do. 'Lily and I have always loved Messy Church, she said, 'so we chose to be baptised as



part of it, so we could share it with the Messy Church family.'

Lis was touched when Holly asked her to be Lily's godparent and is looking forward to walking with both of them as they continue their faith journey, which for Holly may involve preparing for confirmation. 'I've suggested to our interim incumbent that I could work on confirmation preparation with Holly. It would strengthen my own knowledge but also, because we're both neurodivergent, it would be really interesting to trial our new diocesan confirmation resources, to see if they work for people like us.'

Lis gave Holly and Lily two specially chosen gifts for their baptism, a small olive wood holding cross for Lily and a cosy blanket with 'God loves you' written on it for Holly.

'From the very beginning of getting to know Holly, what I most wanted her to know was that God loves her, and that God's love is very different from what she used to think love was when she was caught up in some very toxic, damaging relationships. Holly finds it difficult to get out of the house sometimes, but they've been coming to church whenever Holly's been well enough, and she'll often send me little videos of Lily singing the songs from stay and play, like "Jesus' love is very wonderful", with all the actions.'

'Holly is really full of the Spirit and when she's well she talks about it to other people. She invites them to stay and play and Messy Church, so she's doing her own evangelism in her own way.

'We're a very inclusive church and it's our purpose as a church to share the reality of God's love and grace with as many different people as we possibly can.'

Just before we went to press, Lis shared a lovely piece of news: 'After Holly and

Lily's baptism, another parent asked me what she needed to do to have her children christened. She had thought about it for some time, and after seeing Holly and Lily baptised, she talked with her husband about it and two weeks ago, their three children were baptised.'



Messy Momentum is our new project to better engage with young people and more fully encompass our all-age value. Recruitment is complete and we have a cohort of wonderful, diligent Messy Churches signed up and ready to be part of the pilot! We have Messy Churches from a range of denominations and some ecumenical gatherings, from all over the UK – Preston to Crawley, Tavistock to Whitstable!

We are currently delivering our training for all our pilot approaches over the autumn term and very much looking forward to getting kicked off in January 2026! Watch this space for more news and stories as we implement our plans.

An eternal hope

Jennifer Fellows and her curate husband Simon moved into an estate near Gloucester when their baby son was ten days old. Their mission was to plant an intergenerational community church. From her first job after university Jennifer has been completely 'indoctrinated' by Parenting for Faith, in a good way! As children's pastor at St Paul's Church in St Albans she was not only following in founder Rachel Turner's footsteps but working alongside Anna Hawken, Parenting for Faith lead.

'I went into an environment where Parenting for Faith was already well embedded and I saw the positive impact that it had on that whole church community, in that it gave a language – and almost a trellis, if that makes sense – on which to build discipleship. We spoke to Jennifer not long after she returned from a community church camping trip to New Wine.

'We had six, seven families with us, all of which had under-fives, except one. And it was just a joy: a joy to spend time in community together. We all camped, we cooked together, we ate together, we lived together for a week. Our kids played, our kids argued, our kids fought, and we parented together. Our kids became family.'



'What I realised in St Albans was that if you see Parenting for Faith as not just for children and families, but as a whole church culture, it can affect the whole church incredibly powerfully.'

Now a curate herself, Jennifer has brought Parenting for Faith principles and approaches into the heart of life at Coopers Edge Community Church.



'The key tools, like chat and catch, and creating windows, work for everyone, not just for children. The language of Parenting for Faith is one of the most helpful things I've found for providing frameworks and expressions to explain faith to others. So, for example, we can think of creating windows not just for your children to see into your faith, but for others around you to see into your faith. And we can demystify what it means to hear the voice of God by using words such as "chat and catch" with people of every age.'



Jennifer's description sounds idyllic, full of light and hope, but as we look towards Advent and the darkest days of the year, her understanding of Christian hope is more nuanced:

'I'd say that ministry-wise, I see the hope of Jesus all the time: I see people's lives being transformed and changed. But I'd say that personally, there are things in my life and the lives of people around me that are hard and there are areas where I really struggle and battle with God and cry where are you in this? Like, where are you in infertility? Where are you in miscarriage? Where are you in grief? And I think part of healthy Christian discipleship is being able to hold all those feelings together and I love that when I read through the Psalms I see that no feeling is off limits before God; I see doubt, I see pain, I see grief, I see anger, I see frustration; yet there's always hope. But it's not a worldly hope: it's nothing to do with worldly hopes and ambitions: job, money, having a baby, anything like that. Hope comes from the God of hope, who has an eternal perspective.'



An A-Z of Parenting for Faith

The latest title from Parenting for Faith is a treasure chest of parenting wisdom.

Co-editor Becky Sedgwick explains the team's hopes for this exciting new addition to the Parenting for Faith list.

'One of the fascinating things about being part of Parenting for Faith is hearing stories of what this looks like in different families and situations. Over the years, the Parenting for Faith podcast has captured hundreds of stories of ordinary mums and dads and carers alongside wisdom from others. We wanted to give a glimpse into those riches, and that's what you'll find in the book: snippets from some of our favourite episodes to dip into and be inspired by.'

Look inside at brfonline.org.uk/ a-z-of-parenting-for-faith

Pilgrimage, suffering and hope



We're delighted to have published Trystan Owain Hughes' new book To Hell's Mouth and Back last month. Here he tells the story behind the story.

We live on a builtup urban street. It sometimes feels like a concrete jungle and some

days I struggle to see hope around me. Recently, though, I noticed something I'd passed countless times without seeing: a small, solitary tree, about twice my height. At first I assumed it had been placed there to bring a touch of green to our grey surroundings. Then I realised no one had planted it. Rather, it had broken through the hard, unyielding concrete, reaching for sunlight and oxygen. That tenacious little tree captured what 'hope' means to me.

We all face times of struggle or hardship, whether through grief, illness, anxiety, depression or broken relationships. In my book *To Hell's Mouth and Back*: Pilgrimage, suffering and hope, I reflect on my own experience of suffering, and how I clung to hope through both a gruelling 140-mile pilgrimage and a long recovery from a serious back injury.

That second journey of recovery was also a kind of pilgrimage for pilgrimages are journeys that share certain core elements: suffering, wonder, signs, companionship, dependence and hope. When we recognise these in our own lives, whether we're navigating grief, faith, work, education or illness, we come to understand ourselves more deeply and discover God's light breaking through in the places we least expect. After all, hope is not the absence of struggle - it grows through it.

When I passed that little tree again last week, I noticed something new: fresh green shoots at its base. Hope begets



hope. When we live out 'little hopes', as theologian Karl Barth put it, seeds of new life are sown. God will then water them and green shoots will blossom around us. Our journeys become signs of grace - reminders that, even through cracked concrete and weary ground, God breathes new life into old wounds and bring news beginnings.

That small, beautiful tree – fragile, resilient and still full of life - is a symbol of my two pilgrimages. In my book, I explore both the suffering and the unexpected joys of my transformative journeys. My hope is that something of my story might resonate with yours and encourage you to keep walking your paths with faith, courage and, above all,

Look inside at brfonline.org.uk/ to-hells-mouth-and-back

Attentive to God

Published earlier in the autumn, Attentive to God: Being aware of God's presence *in daily life* is the latest book encouraged to practise 'the life and become attentive to and anxiety, Tony explores six Bible stories that describe individuals encountering God,



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

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











