



## Welcome



A very happy New Year to you, and welcome to this, our first newsletter of 2026. As we take down the decorations and sweep up the last of the pine needles, our thoughts turn to the season of Lent and our preparation for Easter.

I've greatly enjoyed Martyn Percy's new book *The Cost*

of *Christian Living*, featured on page 6. Though not specifically a Lent book, it's perfect for Lent study for both individuals and groups. It takes its cue from his *An Advent Manifesto*, our 2024 Advent book, and through the lens of currency, money, costs and the economy, introduces readers to political theology, and how to read the scriptures in a more reflective and critical light. In turn, we take Martyn's cue for the theme of this newsletter: value and worth. What are our values and where do we assign value and worth?

I guess, like most people, some of my core values were instilled in my childhood and school days. My old school, Beverley High School in East Yorkshire, still has the word 'Pietas' in its crest. A Latin word related to our word 'piety', it embodies a sense of respect, duty and responsibility towards family, the divine – Jesus in the case of my school – community and the state.

At speech days and other formal occasions, the school also used the verse in Philippians in which Paul implores his readers: 'Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves' (Philippians 2:3, NIV).

I don't think I manage it, but I find it a compelling vision of Christian living and relationships and one I aspire, day by day, to live up to. I wonder what values

you have adopted consciously and subconsciously through life, and if you can trace their origin?

So, I'm fascinated by the different takes on our theme from our different ministries: from an Anna Chaplain, a Messy Church leader and a Grandparenting for Faith course leader, and of course, our BRF Resources author, Martyn Percy. I hope you enjoy reading their stories as much as I have and I would love to hear your own stories about or inspired by our theme.\*

With warmest good wishes for 2026

**Karen Laister**  
Head of marketing and engagement

\* Please send them to me at  
karen.laister@brf.org.uk



## The Archbishop Designate's first visit

Patrick and Debbie Ellidson, founders of Ignite and authors of the BRF Resources book of the same title, welcomed the Archbishop Designate Sarah Mullally to their church, All Saints in Canterbury, at 8.00am on the morning her historic appointment was announced. For moving testimony on the impact Ignite is having by valuing people whoever they are, see [page 2](#).

### JANUARY 2026

Valuing people

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What counts?

and more...

## Pray with us...

In the words of this prayer from *Bless the Work of Our Hands: Prayers and reflections for creatives*, by Jane Walters, to be published on 20 February 2026.

*I choose to let go of all anxiety,  
and all its attendant agitation.  
I choose to pause;  
to look to you;  
to take a breath,  
and another,  
and another.  
I call to mind the promises  
of scripture:  
though it feels like the  
biggest battle,  
I will resolutely fix my  
thoughts on you.  
As I surrender to your truth,  
let peace overwhelm me;  
let it overflow into all  
I seek to achieve today.  
Hand in hand, with you,  
dear God,  
my mind renewed,  
let us go into the day together.  
Amen.*

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

*The fear of the Lord is pure,  
enduring for ever;  
the ordinances of the Lord are true  
and righteous altogether.*

PSALM 19:9-10 (NRSV)

*More to be desired are they than gold,  
even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey,  
and drippings of the honeycomb.*



# Hello from Julie and the fundraising team



A very happy New Year to all of you! As 2026 begins, we send our sincere thanks to everyone who supported

our fundraising activities in 2025. Your prayers, kindness and generosity are very much appreciated.

Your response to our Christmas Message Appeal was a huge encouragement to our staff, so thank you for taking the time to fill in the cards and, again, for your prayers and donations.

Inside this newsletter you will find this year's Easter card order form offering a range of designs to suit every taste, from traditional to contemporary. Our full selection of cards is also available online at [brfonline.org.uk](http://brfonline.org.uk) or please feel free to contact our friendly Fundraising Team

on 01865 319700 to order by phone. Our sustainably produced cards are becoming more and more popular and are a great way to support our work.



This January we are raising funds to support our ministries and also with your help we would like to provide 650 copies of our books for children who attend the

Spring Harvest Christian Conference. Last year at Spring Harvest over 600 children made a commitment to follow Jesus. Our goal is to provide the books to be included in children's goodie bags as a source of encouragement to them.

**If you would like to support this January Appeal, you may do so using the donation form that is enclosed with this mailing, or you can give online at [brf.org.uk/donate](http://brf.org.uk/donate)**

We need to raise £1.3 million this financial year to fund our ministries, and we are reliant upon fundraising and gifts in wills to achieve this. We couldn't do what we do without you.

If you would like to make a donation to support any of our ministries, or become a Friend of BRF Ministries by making a regular monthly gift, please do contact us.

With very best wishes

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



## Valuing people, and the impact it has

Last autumn Patrick and Debbie Ellisdon presented a webinar to introduce people to the work of Ignite in offering a very different kind of church in areas of high deprivation. Towards the end of the session, Patrick shared two compelling examples of the impact we can have by living out Jesus' example of according every person value, whatever their circumstances.

We've just started our own new Ignite here (All Saints, Canterbury), and we have between 15 and 20 guests turning up. We've been running for four weeks, but what is really interesting, and I know has happened in other places, is how quickly people own Ignite. Guests feel intensely valued by coming to Ignite, even after a very short time. So we had two instances already. One guy came up to me afterwards. He'd had a row with

his mum in Ignite – which happens – but he said, 'I love Ignite!' He'd only been four times, but he said, 'It helps me be a better person.' Isn't that just an amazing statement?

And then another lass who's only been once so far. We always offer guests a meal with plates and cutlery, and we make it look good with tablecloths and things. And she said, 'Thank you for treating me like a human being. So often, people who are poor are just given handouts, but they're not made to feel important. Whereas you laid out your tables with plates and cutlery and tablecloths, and I felt important.'

It was so moving. And that's what Ignite is about: the power of relationships, offering genuine love and respect to people whoever they are, and that opens up the door to introducing them to this amazing Saviour that we know as Jesus.

**Find out more about our book, Ignite, at [brfonline.org.uk/ignite](http://brfonline.org.uk/ignite)**

# A golden thread



There's a golden thread linking Eileen Brassington's journey from primary school teacher to Anna Chaplain, and

that's the underlying values each role embodies: the worth, respect and nurture given to every individual child she taught and every older person she walks alongside. A Geordie by birth, Eileen trained in Sheffield before moving to Devon, where she met David, her husband of 40 years. She retired in 2012 and soon became involved in Anna Chaplaincy in Holy Cross Church in Crediton, continuing a long involvement with older people, which began with her grandmother, who was born in 1892.

'By the time I was 10 she was 70, and she had funds of stories from life before aeroplanes, cars and the telephone. I used to love to sit and listen to all her tales.' Then, when Eileen was at grammar school, she got involved – 'because of my gran' – in a scheme linking school students with lonely older people isolated in tower blocks following the razing of hundreds of streets of traditional terraced housing.

Eileen has a complicated monthly schedule juggling chaplaincy, church, community and family. As an Anna Chaplain, she works in the wider community and spends time at one-to-one visits with care home residents and leading services.

'Anna Chaplaincy is all about meeting older people where they are,' says Eileen, 'being alongside them, whatever their faith, and giving them your time, listening and letting them talk, which is very precious to them.' And sometimes little gestures can mean the world to those Eileen accompanies. 'Somebody once said they hadn't had homemade lemon curd for years, so next time I visited, I took some lemon curd. And I've taken in sweet peas for someone to sniff when they haven't been able to get outside. They're tiny things, but it makes them feel valued, and it's a link back to life before being in a care home.'

Sometimes valuing people involves a bigger project than a jar of lemon curd or a pot of sweet peas. 'One of the ladies I look after was isolated in her home because she couldn't get her wheelchair down the ramp. Her family worked on the ramp and then I said to my husband, it would be great if we could get her back to church. So, he offered to train as a mid-Devon mobility bus driver in order to get a wheelchair bus, and with the ramp and the bus, we got her back to church. It was brilliant for her, but it also made everybody else aware of how much can happen if you concentrate on one person's need.'

Another priority Eileen has brought with her from her teaching years is building up and empowering individuals. 'As a teacher, you try to give children the skills and self-worth they need to thrive, and it's the same with older people. For me, the hardest thing is when they say, "I don't really want to be here anymore, I'm ready to die." That's hard to answer, isn't it, especially if they're suffering. But I try to remind them how much they are valued: by their family, by me, their community and by God.'

Being an Anna Chaplain is a two-way thing for Eileen 'You're valuing people, offering something that they really seem to value. We're not doing it to get anything in return, we're doing it for them, but somehow we get blessed as well. It is a God-given thing. That's all I can say.'

## The best conference I've been to in 6+ years of ministry

*It's as though I've been given a glimpse of what my life post-retirement could look like. I was already enthusiastic about Anna Chaplaincy, but I felt such a confirmation that this will be part of my life in the future when I'm not working full-time for the church. Woman after woman (and they were mostly women!) spoke so powerfully and eloquently about how God has used them and is using them and how their life experiences have prepared them for what they're doing now. I felt so at home and as though I was in the right place. The best conference I've been to in 6+ years of ministry.*

SALLY BATES

## Gathering gold



*'I don't think the Gathering could have gone any better – it was such a joy, and such a rich experience.'*

... said Anna Chaplaincy lead Debbie Ducille after the network annual gathering held in the autumn. The theme of 'gold' was woven into every session, and afterwards BRF Ministries CEO Richard Fisher paid tribute to Anna Chaplains everywhere.



*'It is quite mind-blowing: the sheer calibre of those involved in this ministry and the passion they have for what they do. It was really lovely to be able to stand there and reaffirm to them just how important and valued Anna Chaplaincy is to BRF Ministries and how significant a part it plays in our overall mission and vision.'*

# It's your community!

**It wasn't the highlight of the year, but of nine years, when five adults and nine children were baptised at a very special Messy service at St Mark's, Downham, in south-east London last summer. Team vicar Nick Walsh arrived nine years ago this month (January 2026) and soon 'fell in love with the community. It feels right. It feels like I fit here.'**



St Mark's was originally a 'tin tabernacle': one of the temporary corrugated iron churches put up on the 'pre-fab' estates built to house people bombed out in the war. Replaced by a permanent building in the 1960s, it now lies between the old pre-fab area and the 'garden city' estate put up between the wars.

'There's a lot of green space, despite being a housing estate,' says Nick. 'There's a solid sense of community and a lot of opportunity. I've always had a heart for those who've been forgotten or on the margins and Downham very much has that kind of history. There was actually a wall built to separate the estate from the rich area so that the wealthy people from Bromley didn't have to deal with the poor from Downham.'

The congregation was small when Nick arrived, and most of them no longer

lived in the area. Even Messy Church, established by Nick's predecessor, was in decline. So in 2018, 'we had to think: how are we going refresh this?'

The turnaround began when Nick's wife, Lucie, began encouraging the mums at the school gate to come.

'And they started coming! All these working-class mums from the community – the mums that people used to sneer at when they'd be outside the school gate, smoking and chatting and laughing loudly; the people that the school told us we'd never connect with!'

But the message from the mums was clear. This needs to change! 'They took over,' says Nick. 'They started volunteering. They started preparing the food. They started looking at the activities. We did lose the original church volunteers, but they didn't really want to do Messy Church. They wanted to do very formal arts and crafts with salad to eat, and that didn't work for the estate families.'

Nick enjoyed some 'delicious food' and some 'very interesting conversations about activities and themes'.

'They'd come up with something, and we'd say, yes, and what's the Christian content in this? And oftentimes they would surprise me. One time they wanted to do Chinese New Year and I said, okay, and where's the Christian message in this? And they said, well, it's celebrating other cultures and welcoming people of different cultures, isn't it? And isn't that part of what church should be?'

Messy Church meets monthly on a Wednesday after school and since 2024 there has been no Sunday service at St Mark's. Instead, Messy Church is thriving, with some 40 people, adults and children, currently coming to sessions.

'I have never successfully run any kind of enquirers course in our parish,' says Nick, 'because courses don't work here. You can book something with someone, but life just gets on top of it.'

Whereas the refreshed Messy model has worked.

'Doing the various activities in the hall definitely works and the after-school slot also works. There's a break between the activities and the church. Because we're in a separate building, we can say, right, we're going to go through to church now. If you don't want to come because you're having sensory overload, or because you're having a bad week, or you're new to it and you're not sure, then you can stay in the hall.

'That gap means that it's opt-in. It's not like you're having to do church, but it's been exciting when we've had kids who say I'm not going into church for ages, and then suddenly they say, can I come into church?'

Is any of this replicable, or is it unique to Downham?

'I think the key things that are always translatable are the Messy Church values. So, for example, the value that everybody has a part to play in this.

'The key has been local ownership. When it was the church people "doing" Messy Church to the community, it did not work. But when we said, "This is a community. In fact, it's your community. It's your project," and once the non-church people started getting really stuck into Messy Church, that was when it took off, and that was when the gospel opportunities and the mission really happened.'

Read a longer version of this interview with Nick Walsh at [messychurch.brf.org.uk/blog](https://messychurch.brf.org.uk/blog)



## Start-up Microgrants

'Seed money' often has a value way beyond the initial investment, and thanks to generous funding from the Church of England, we can offer 'seed money' in the form of a support package to Church of England churches in areas of deprivation wanting to start a new Messy Church. The package includes microgrants of £250 to purchase resources for your new Messy Church, a bundle of Messy Church books worth over £50, training and ongoing support in the form of an online learning community of Messy Church leaders ministering in areas of deprivation.

More information at [messychurch.brf.org.uk/projects/microgrants](https://messychurch.brf.org.uk/projects/microgrants)

Find out more about Messy Church and Messy Momentum at [messychurch.brf.org.uk](https://messychurch.brf.org.uk)



## Down the generations

Former nursery nurse, adult education tutor and devoted grandmother of six, Erica Splawnyk is passionate about Parenting for Faith and Grandparenting for Faith. Based in Ashton-under-Lyne with Osyp, her husband of 47 years, she began developing work with families when they arrived at their present church, St John's, Dunkinfield some 13 years ago.

'God had given me a real passion for children and families, which had grown for over 20 years, both in secular work settings and in the church. At St John's I was given the opportunity to do more. There was children's work which was brilliant, and there was youth work which was brilliant, but having something independently for families was a very new concept, and it just grew organically.' Then somebody at church introduced Erica to Rachel Turner's work with Parenting for Faith.

'What I really liked about Parenting for Faith was how different it was,' says Erica. 'Often family resources are theme based, but Parenting for Faith was a whole-life approach: whatever the subject, whatever you're facing, how do we bring God into it? How do we see where God is at work in it, and how can we equip and prepare our children for that relationship themselves? It's not like they're waiting in line to become a Christian when they're older; they're actually having that relationship with God now, and that was so fresh and inspiring.'

Erica began looking into Parenting for Faith more deeply and the impact was dramatic:

'All my previous conceptions of what you would do to help parents with their journey with their children, with

God, completely changed. I realised that I was talking at families and doing it to families, instead of drawing alongside and cheering them on to do it themselves.'

Erica completed the Cliff College Parenting for Faith course and started attending The Forge gatherings for children and families workers. She ran the Parenting for Faith course at church during lockdown and has run it several times since.

'On every single Parenting for Faith course I've done, I've noticed that the women are being discipled as much as the children, and that's had such value as God has worked in those women's lives. Somehow they're making sense of faith themselves by the simple way that it's put across in the course, and then they're able to help their children, so it's been a joy working with the material.'

It was at one of The Forge retreats that Erica found out about Grandparenting for Faith. 'Being a grandma, of course it really resonated with me personally, but as I looked around our church, I saw a whole host of grandparents who are caring for their grandchildren, or they're bringing them to church because the families don't bring them. And those grandparents really didn't appreciate the difference they're making to the lives

of those children, and they really didn't have any concept of the huge value there is in what they're doing.'

This was underlined for Erica when she read *Grandparenting for Faith* and all the stories and testimonies from adults who had been profoundly influenced by the faith of their grandparents, often only realising the impact years later.

'I thought, I need to share this in church to encourage these grandparents. God wouldn't let it go out of my mind.' She organised a Grandparenting for Faith group, following the chapters in the book, which she facilitated with Osyp. Twelve people met fortnightly for eight sessions and by the end of the course, deep bonds had formed. But what drew them to the group in the first place?

'That depended very much on where they were with God,' says Erica. 'It ranged from "we were always brought to church when we were little and I want them to have the same experience" through to "I want them to have the same relationship with God for life. I want them to have that now, and they're not going to get it at home." It was all about passing on values and sharing experiences down the generations, one to the next.'



There is now a helpful six-session course based on the *Grandparenting for Faith* book. You can buy the resources to lead the course in your own church, or sign up for the next national online course.

**THE COURSE!**

Find out more at [parentingforfaith.brf.org.uk/grandparenting-for-faith-course](http://parentingforfaith.brf.org.uk/grandparenting-for-faith-course)



# The Cost of Christian Living



Martyn Percy introduces his new book *The Cost of Christian Living*

Most of us, I guess, will have some very early memories of our first encounters with money.

I can remember as a child the thrill of finding a coin in Christmas pudding. The thruppenny bit and the sixpence were planted by my grandfather, but I still have the most vivid memory of almost cracking a tooth. And then wondering if the tooth fairy might still be sympathetic.

I can remember 'going decimal' a few years later, and the excitement of newly minted coins. I can also recall overhearing adults as they fretted over Britain needing a loan from the IMF,

the price of fuel, and shortages of food. I remember the fear and the uncertainty of the time, and it echoes loudly in the present.

'Money Talk' is part of our everyday life. There are budgets, bills and books to balance – and this forms part of our work and home life, and plans for retirement or marriage. But as we all know – and these are words from Albert Einstein, not mine – 'Not everything that can be counted counts; and not everything that counts can be counted.' What do we most value, and what are we worth? And how does God answer those same questions about us?

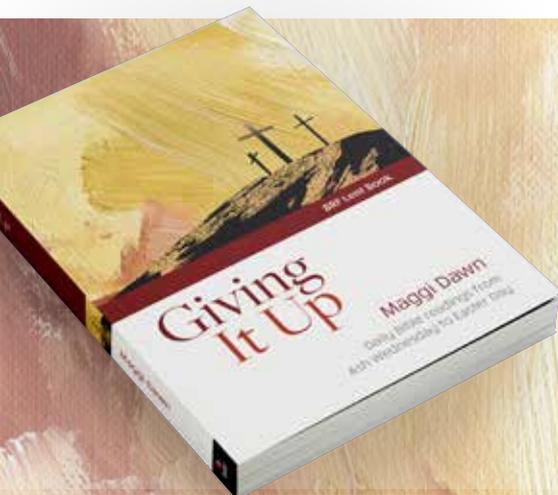
As a theologian, I have always been fascinated by the things we barely notice because they seem so

normal or commonplace. And in a lot of my teaching and research, I am sometimes described as a 'missionary anthropologist' because I often write about the ordinary things that go on in churches. That might be where people sit in church, the stories that congregations tell, and what kind of spiritual mood tends to pervade the worship. Naturally, it includes how the collection is taken (if there is one), what causes congregations might donate to – and how they talk about money.

Yet many churches in the UK will adopt 'dinner party rules' when it comes to money. Like sex and politics, they prefer not to mention the subject at all. And yet the gospels are full of stories about money, coins, tax, debt, spending, thrift, consumption, investment, profligacy and meanness. So, one of the reasons for writing *The Cost of Christian Living* was to help readers explore the different meanings of money, value and currency in the gospels. Through these lenses, I introduce readers to some more alert political theology for our times.

*The Cost of Christian Living* invites us to ponder new ways of reading the gospels 'with the safety catch off', as it were. To understand and apply the scriptures in a more reflective and critical light, under the radical agenda of Jesus' kingdom of God.

To order go to [brfonline.org.uk/the-cost-of-christian-living](http://brfonline.org.uk/the-cost-of-christian-living)



Our 2026 Lent book is *Giving It Up*, a newly revised and updated edition of Maggi Dawn's popular reflections.

The idea of 'giving something up for Lent' is widely known, yet how many know that the ancient discipline of the Lenten fast had several purposes? It was designed as a reminder of our daily dependence on God for all our needs, to draw us closer to God in prayer, to reconnect with the idea of community, and to help us follow Christ's journey

through the wilderness and on to Jerusalem.

How many of us simply abstain from some treat or other for a few weeks and fail to engage with this deeper meaning of Lent? This book shows how Lent can be a time for exploring a different kind of 'giving up', one that can transform our lives.

To order go to [brfonline.org.uk/giving-it-up](http://brfonline.org.uk/giving-it-up)

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.

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