Welcome to this our first edition of Together for 2022.

With a fresh year ahead, we’re feeling energetic, so join us on the football field as we find out about a sporty church initiative in Chatham engaging with those who might not usually associate with the Church, and which is raising self-esteem at the same time. (Focus on pg 8)

The themes of dedication and service are woven through two of our stories this time. The first involves a beautiful tapestry, which after twenty-years of dedication, has been restored to Rochester Cathedral (Focus on pg 14). While in our One to One interview (pg 24), we meet the motor-bike loving Archdeacon of Bromley and Bexley who is retiring after eighteen years in post.

Lent is of course just around the corner. If you’re looking for inspiration on how to journey through this season of preparation and reflection, then look no further than our centre-spread and resources (Headspace pg 20), for some good ideas.

Plus, we have our usual great mix of news and personal story – if you’ve ever thought God couldn’t possibly have a plan for you, then check out our Everyday Faith (pg 26) item to be convinced otherwise.

Stay safe

Jennifer Ross
Communications Manager
INSIDE TRACK | NEWS

SERVICE WELCOMES THE NEW ARCHDEACON OF TONBRIDGE

The Venerable Sharon Copestake was welcomed into her new role as the Archdeacon of Tonbridge at a special service in St Stephen’s Church, Tonbridge on Sunday 16 January 2022.

Representatives from the Archdeaconry, civic dignitaries, as well as friends and family came to support Sharon, as she began her new ministerial role.

Sharon comes to the role having served as Vicar at St Francis, Strood for over six years, and as Area Dean of Strood for almost five.

With the number of those who could attend restricted due to the ongoing pandemic, well-wishers from across the Archdeaconry, and the Diocese, were able to join the service via a livestream on the church’s YouTube channel.

Bishop Simon Burton-Jones led the service, and in his sermon, spoke of the role of an archdeacon as being deeply rooted in the ethos of the early church in its commitment to service.

He encouraged Sharon, and all those listening, to not be overcome with worry, to not grow weary of figuring out what is the right thing to do, and to never lose sight of the goal above all goals—which is to be drawn into the heart of God together.

During the service Sharon renewed the declarations she made at her ordination as a reminder of the original promises she made then, and took new oaths committing her to her role as Archdeacon of Tonbridge.

NEWS | INSIDE TRACK

GETTING MESSY

Holy Trinity Church in Penge has been getting messy to explore what it means to be “church”. They were challenged to build a church out of newspaper, before thinking about how God calls all of us to be the body of Christ. Thankfully, this was then modelled perfectly, by everyone helping to tidy up!

NEWCOMERS’ LUNCH

St Stephen’s Church in Tonbridge enjoyed getting to know some of the newer members of their church at their Welcome Lunch – a great way to meet new people in a relaxed atmosphere. A big ‘shout out’ to all who helped by preparing the delicious food, and those who welcomed and served.

CHAPLAIN FOR HOSPICE

Congratulations to Judith Mills who was licensed as a Licensed Lay Worker at King Charles the Martyr Church, Tunbridge Wells in February. She was also licensed as the chaplain to The Hospice in the Weald. Vicar, the Rev Laurence Powell said: “It was a truly joyous occasion, and we all look forward to working with Jude in the future.”

BIG UP AYLESFORD LITTER MONITORS

A big ‘well done’ to the small but dedicated group of litter pickers at St Peter and St Paul, Aylesford. Despite the bad weather on their most recent outing, a ‘shocking amount’ of litter was collected, which is great news for the local environment. Good work everyone!
In January, St Philip and St James Church in Waldersalde (Pip n Jims) was delighted to welcome Bishop Simon Burton-Jones to a special Sunday focusing on everyday calling. Bishop Simon talked about how everyone has an individual vocation and witness that is valued and precious in the sight of God - whether you are a parent, bus driver, office worker, accountant, or however you identify.

In the moving service, Bishop Simon anointed and prayed for many, in order to encourage and affirm them in their everyday faith.

Find out more about how you can explore your Everyday Faith at www.rochester.anglican.org/everyday-faith/
WE NEED THESE CONVERSATIONS IN THE CHURCH
How the Church is exploring questions of sexuality, relationships and identity.

“It’s been stimulating and interesting to hear other people’s views and experiences”... “It has provided me with information on things about which I had been completely ignorant” ... “a safe space to discuss - and cake!”

These are just some of the overwhelmingly positive responses of the nearly 40 participants on the Tunbridge Wells Deanery Living in Loving and Faith course.

Living in Love and Faith is a learning and listening process taking place across the Church of England encouraging individuals, parishes, deaneries, and dioceses to explore questions about how identity, sexuality, relationships, and marriage fit within the bigger picture of the good news of Jesus Christ.

It asks, what does it mean to live in love and faith together in the Kingdom of God, and still rejoice in those differences.

The Rev Dr Joel Love, a vicar in Rochester and also chaplain to the Living in Love and Faith process in the Diocese, says that he understands that some people might feel wary or nervous about approaching these questions, but that the course is actually very supportive:

“I’ve found that people have been really surprised by how gentle and supportive the course is of everyone and how it encourages us to really listen to each other.

“And so, these tools are designed to help make the process as safe and straightforward and accessible as possible for everyone, no matter where they’re coming from.”

Back in the Tunbridge Wells Deanery, the course has been meeting at Bennett Diocesan Memorial School and brings together nine churches representing different context and traditions.

This joint course emerged from deanery clergy hoping to provide the best opportunity for congregations to engage with others - especially people with different views and experiences.

“The neutral space provided by the school has been so helpful” feeds back one of the organisers.

“People have chatted openly with others and no doubt that’s because the course creates a safe space for important conversations.”

Leading the course has proven simple as there is a wealth of resources available, including a book, podcasts, films, and an online library of additional material, all of which, according to the course leaders in Tunbridge Wells, “are expertly balanced and produced.”

It’s also possible to go on the Living in Love and Faith journey as an individual with all the materials available on the Living in Love and Faith Resource Hub.

A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO HELP INFORM THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH
Once a person has explored the materials, the most important thing to do next is to respond.

This can be done either by filling in an online questionnaire, or by submitting a creative response. Both options are available in the LLF Resource Hub.

For the Rev Jane Winter, Living in Love and Faith Advocate for the Diocese of Rochester, the main thing is that people respond.

This is so that those taking the process forward can hear what Church members from a diverse range of views, perspectives and experiences are discerning on this important issue.

She also believes that these conversations are really needed in the Church:

“A really interesting question that comes from young people is that society’s moved on, so why do we need these conversations anymore?

“And while that’s something to rejoice in, we do need those conversations in the Church, because we’ve never had them in such a way that we’ve been able to engage with difference without people feeling they’re under pressure to think or believe a particular view, and Living in Love and Faith offers that.”

She continues:

“It offers us the opportunity to respect one another and to honour each other’s different points of view and still live together in the Kingdom of God, and still rejoice in those differences.”

What happens next
Here’s what will happen once the listening and learning process finishes in April 2022:

• Findings published: Once the engagement process has closed, the findings of ‘Listening to the Whole Church’ will be published in September 2022.

• Discernment: Between September and December 2022, the College of Bishops will begin a discernment process in light of the LLF Book, and the findings of ‘Listening to the Whole Church’. They will use this discernment to create a set of proposals.

• Way forward: In February 2023, the General Synod will consider proposals from the College and House of Bishops and agree a clear direction of travel.

3 SIMPLE STEPS
How to take part
1. REGISTER
Log on to the Living in Love and Faith Learning Hub to access all the resources. Search ‘Living in Love and Faith Learning Hub’ in your browser.

2. EXPLORE
Begin your own learning journey through the resources, or with others. They include:
• the five-session video-based course
• podcasts
• films.

3. RESPOND
Complete the online questionnaire via the Learning Hub or consider responding creatively.
Responses must be in by 30 April 2022.

www.churchofengland.org/resources/living-love-and-faith
HOMELESS and socially isolated people are finding friendship, support and confidence through a new football project in Medway.

Genesis Football uses the power of the sport to reach out to vulnerable adults through a free, weekly training session, friendly kick-about and hot lunch.

And the local church is at the heart of it.

The project is inspired by a similar one set up 10 years ago in London by the Christian football organisation, Ambassadors Football.

The Rev Luke Bacon, one of the ministers at the recently reopened St John, Chatham, was part of the team behind bringing the programme to Medway.

“A large part of our work is connecting with people who are vulnerable. This project helps to build the aspirations, self-worth and fitness of young men and women who would otherwise have nothing particularly positive to look forward to.”

“For some of the guys that come here, it is the one time in the week when they are getting out of their rooms or their bedsits and spending time with others.”

Stephen Read from Ambassadors Football added: “We’re in a time when people do get lonely and vulnerable, and we want to be here for each other, and football is a great way of doing that.”

The sessions launched in the autumn, supported by Medway Sport and the Medway Night Shelter and led by coaches from Anchorians FC at the new Watling Park Sports Centre in Gillingham.

The participants also receive pastoral support and advice from staff from Medway Council’s homelessness team, the Night Shelter and other partner organisations, as well as being given the chance to explore their faith if they wish.

The Rev Belinda Beckhelling, Medway Night Shelter
Coordinator and Guest Support Worker, says: “The Medway Night Shelter has been working with men and women who find themselves homeless for over six years. One of the things we have noticed is how isolated and cut off from their networks these people become.

“Genesis Football allows for these social networks to be rebuilt and new connections to be made. Our homeless guests at the shelter have always told us how important it is that they get to be involved in everyday things that are open to everyone.”

Timothy Green, 37, is a regular participant. He says: “These sessions are really important to me. I am out of isolation now and I have a life, but I was in hospital for a long time.

“It’s brilliant being here with the lads – there’s a real fellowship and you can see the improvement, even from the less able players.”

He doesn’t think it is odd that the church is involved, “No, not at all. I think it’s about time it happened, and we’re really going places. I think it’s a really good medium for people who are Christians to get involved in the community.”

He added: “It’s just a wonderful atmosphere and there’s a great team spirit. I would really encourage anyone to come along.”

Indeed, for Luke, the Church has a long history of being involved in football:

“So many of our famous Premiership teams were founded by churches, and so it feels like we’re right back at grass roots engaging positively through football.”

For him, Genesis Football is exactly what St John, Chatham is all about:

“It’s just amazing. Our heart is to serve the people of Chatham and to see people who wouldn’t normally connect with the church engage in positive activity.

“When we play football together on a Thursday morning, it feels like we’re doing everything we think we should be doing as a church; bringing people together to have a good time, exercising, eating together – that is such an important part of building community – and then often I get the privilege to share something of my faith and the Christian hope.

“I love it. It’s the highlight of my week.”
After some 3,000 hours, spread over 20 years, and with much research on fabrics, techniques and historical sources along the way, a one-hundred-year-old altar dressing has been expertly and lovingly restored to Rochester Cathedral by the Rochester Cathedral Embroiderers.

A story of skill, commitment, and friendship, the restored Festal Altar Frontal — a piece of embellished cloth which covers an altar — was rededicated and placed on the High Altar at the start of a special Evensong in January.

It is believed that the Rev Ernest Geldart, an architect, artist and designer of ecclesiastical embroidery, designed the Festal Altar Frontal in 1900. After 100 years, however, time had taken its toll and so in 1999, the Rev Canon John Armson established the Rochester Cathedral Embroiderers to restore the Frontal to its original condition.

The group of volunteers, consisting of Westminster Abbey embroiderers, a college head of Art and Design and other experienced embroiderers, created a plan, as Susan Burlace, Conservation Leader explains:

“We started by precisely tracing the Frontal and Super Frontal to enable us to place all the pieces back in their correct position on new fabric.

“The next stage was to find the correct colour silks and gold to begin the process of restoring.”

In total, twenty-five individual panels were removed and mounted on frames for restoration and, as far as possible, original gold thread and other work was retained.

When each individual piece was finished it was stored until the team was ready to reassemble the entire Frontal. This needed a frame which could be extended because, due to the size of the Frontal, it was only possible to work from the centre out. Otherwise, the embroiderers would not be able to reach to stitch.

Susan says that there were some particularly tricky bits: “The red cross was worked over a very small even weave material — this enabled us to keep the shape of the cross. It took many hours though and had to be achieved in short bursts as it was very close stitching and a strain for our eyes.”

The project has been a real labour of love, says Susan:

“We’ve developed a real friendship and understanding of each other’s needs over the years, and at each stage of the project, we’ve discussed what needs to be done. We all have different strengths, and this has enabled us to work very successfully together.”

Margaret, another one of the embroiders, says that it has been a great pleasure to be part of such a special historic project:

“It’s been a real privilege. Working with like-minded people who share my passion for needlework, I have learnt so much thanks to the generous help of others; techniques, use of colour and design, friendship and fun. I love being part of this group and the Cathedral community. I could go on … just so enjoyable”

Susan concurs, “We all agree that it has been a privilege to work in Rochester Cathedral and on such a beautiful Frontal for all to see and enjoy enhancing worship for all who join in the Services.”

For any enquiries about volunteering please contact Sandy Struben on sandy.struben@rochestercathedral.org or call 01634 810077.
This Lent we are called to reflect on the injustices of the world and ask what God is calling us to do about them, by engaging with the Church of England’s #LiveLent: Embracing Justice theme.

Lent is the six weeks of preparation before Easter, and over these forty days, we step into God’s work in the here and now. In doing so, we move from brokenness towards wholeness.

Here are 4 ways you can be part of the journey this Lent:

**GET BOOKED UP:** The Archbishop of Canterbury’s 2022 Lent Book, Embracing Justice (SPCK) has been written by Isabelle Hamley and supports the Embracing Justice theme. Over six chapters, she invites us to examine our own lives truthfully, to see the world more deeply and to pray – for the church and the world far and near – that “justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5.24). Available to order from Church House Publishing.

**EXPLORE WEEKLY THEMES** – The LiveLent: Embracing Justice booklet offers a daily Bible reading, a short reflection and a prayer, as well as a practical challenge linked to the week’s theme. An accompanying child’s version is also available to help children and their families explore how we can live well together.

**LENT ONLINE:** The book and booklets will be accompanied by daily social media posts from Ash Wednesday (2 March) to Easter Day (17 April), together with a wide range of free digital resources for individuals, groups and churches on the Church of England’s social media channels. Find out more at: www.churchofengland.org/resources/livelent-2022-church-resources-embracing-justice

**GET YOUR YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED:** This year, the Church of England is excited to be working in partnership with The Way, who create innovative faith-based video content by and for young people. Where appropriate, why not encourage the young people in your church to follow ‘The Way UK’ on Instagram, YouTube and TikTok. Their content to accompany Lent and Easter will include videos exploring work and money, prayer, and women in the story of Holy Week.
HOW CAN CHRISTIANS ENGAGE WITH THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS?

With the fallout from the pandemic, the changes to universal credit and the rise in National Insurance, the cost of living has risen 5.4% this year. In this article, Tim Farron, a Christian and former Leader of the Liberal Democrat Party explores why, as Christians, we should care deeply about this crisis and apply the principles of our faith to tackling these issues.

Political decisions affect us all. Governments set tax and benefit levels, decide what to spend on public services, and respond to economic shocks and longer-term trends that affect our quality of life.

When people are suffering, it often shows that something isn’t working properly within our political system. After nearly two years of pandemic and the market disruption caused by separation from Europe, millions of people now face the dreadful choice between heating and eating.

The cost of living is rising fast, seen clearly in increasing food prices and energy bills. At the same time a National Insurance rise and cuts in universal credit will see incomes fall further.

This affects many of us directly and increases debt, anxiety and despair, as people are unable to meet their family’s needs. Poverty and deprivation are dreadful things, and often go hand in hand with a sense of personal failure, an assault on our dignity. It is a crushing experience.

As Christians we should care deeply about this crisis, but how do we apply the principles of our faith to tackling these issues?

No human political ideology holds all the answers. Governments and political movements do not offer salvation. The Bible is clear that only Jesus can do this.

Jesus said we will always have the poor with us, yet he also told us to love our neighbour sacrificially, so he surely didn’t mean us to simply shrug and leave it at that. We are to do to others what we would have done to us, and none of us is ever more than a couple of steps from the gutter. We cannot just close our eyes and pray for the second coming to hurry up and sort everything out.

Whilst we are on this earth, God commands us to carry on his work, which encompasses every sphere. Jesus came to save souls, but in the Gospels we also see him healing and feeding people. He hungered for justice.

Indeed, justice runs as a major thread throughout the Bible, and God expects his people to enact it. Isaiah 59 says: “the Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice... he was appalled that there was no one to intervene.” Churches are active in practical community work – running foodbanks, debt counselling and other services – as an outworking of God’s love. We may not label these actions as ‘politics’ and indeed parts of the church are anxious that promoting a ‘social gospel’ focused on physical needs is a distraction from our need to repent and seek forgiveness through Jesus.

But this is a false divide. In Acts 2 we see the early Christians “(giving) to anyone who had need”, and as part of the same process, “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved”.

Before we realise the future hope promised in the Bible, where there will be no more death, suffering, or corruption, we are given authority to enact justice and to seek society’s welfare. God has not withdrawn from the mess that we have made of his creation. Instead he invites us to work alongside him, to reflect his goodness into our broken world, until one day he redeems all things.

So how should Christians think about practical solutions? There is no single ‘Christian’ way to tackle these issues.

As we seek to love our neighbour, we may suggest different approaches. We may be vocal in our disagreement, but the key point is that God wants us to engage and not step away. Let’s seek to understand the issues – which are often more complex and nuanced than the news headlines suggest. Pray about them, and ask for wisdom for those in leadership who are tasked with the great responsibility of pursuing justice in our nation today.

The need of my neighbour is my business and my concern. Let’s ask God for his help, intervention and guidance as we seek practical ways of meeting that need.

Tim Farron MP

Tim Farron has been the Member of Parliament for Westmorland and Lonsdale since 2005, and served as the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Party from 2015 to 2017. Tim is also the host of Premier’s ‘A Mucky Business’ podcast, which unpacks the murky world of politics and encourages believers around the UK to engage prayerfully.
HEARING GOD IN POETRY
Fifty Poems for Lent and Easter
This beautifully presented Lent book offers six poems for every week from Ash Wednesday, leading up to Holy Week, with ten poems specially chosen for Easter. A short reflection from Richard Harries accompanies each poet and the poem, drawing out their spiritual insights and how they communicate God’s presence.

From Maya Angelou and W. H. Auden to Phyllis Wheatley and Walt Whitman, Hearing God in Poetry invites you to take a closer look at fifty great poems. Some are well known, some deserve to be better known, but all say something distinctive to lift the spirit.

Published by SPCK

CHILDREN IN THE SHADOWS
In this Lent course from The Clewer Initiative, we are invited to consider the child exploitation in its various forms, the scale of the abuse, and the need for us all to increase our awareness and effective response.

The Clewer Initiative is the Church of England’s work to combat modern slavery. The material has a particular focus upon county lines – one of the fastest expanding areas of child exploitation in the UK, as well as providing a global perspective to consider our responsibilities as privileged citizens in a fragile world.

Available to download at: www.theclewerinitiative.org/resources/children-in-the-shadows-an-introduction

SOUL FUEL FOR YOUNG EXPLORERS
If you’re looking for something bite-sized and engaging for the young person in your life this Lent, then take a look at this book from TV star, former SAS soldier and Chief Ambassador to World Scouting, Bear Grylls.

Here he offers seventy reflections, along with stories from his own life and faith, to inspire children and young people to find courage and confidence in their faith too.

“In a nutshell, my faith tells me that I am known, that I am secure and that I am loved - regardless of the storms I may find myself in from time to time, regardless of how often I fall and fail.” - Bear Grylls

Published by SPCK

THE BEACH
A journey through pain with the God of play
In this thought-provoking book, Mandy Carr – the Vicar of St George’s Church, Weald Sevenoaks - describes a series of encounters with The Trinity that have transformed her faith and enabled her to understand and address the connection between fear and chronic pain.

These encounters take place in what Mandy describes as a ‘place of meeting in my head and heart’, which she is taken to as she listens to the soundscape of a shoreline. She calls this place, The Beach.

On The Beach, she meets three characters, Abba, Jesus and Rhema.

In his foreword to the book, Gordon Oliver says, ‘There is something mystical and earthy, hilarious and agonising, wistful and thoroughly practical in these playful, joyful and challenging encounters with God, who loves to set people free from all that holds us back.’

Through her experiences, she invites us to engage with God in new ways and rediscover the love He has for us all.

“I felt that if God wanted us to connect with Him, He would not make it more difficult that it needed to be.” (Mandy Carr, The Beach)

The Beach is available to buy on Amazon in both paperback and Kindle editions.
UPCOMING EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

WILDERNESS PATH
65 Maidstone Road, Chatham
26 MARCH 2022, 10am-4pm
A Lenten Quiet Day of a creative, contemplative experience, exploring and reflecting on three postures; Walking, Sitting and Standing on A Wilderness Path. Led by Elaine Wilkins.
To book please email: susannecarlssons@hotmail.co.uk

LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH Creative Day
at St Benedict’s Centre
9 APRIL 2022, 10am-3pm
A day to engage with the Living in Love and Faith course and respond creatively. Cost £10 (including hot drinks please bring your own lunch)
To book please email: bookings@stbenedictscentre.org

THE LEAVES OF THE TREES
at Rochester Cathedral
24 APRIL - 22 MAY 2022
A touring artwork installation offering reflective memorial to the affects of the Coronavirus pandemic. A simple but moving artwork creating a moment of connection and calm.
For more information visit Rochester Cathedral’s website.

ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL ORGAN SERIES
at Rochester Cathedral
Recital from April until September at 7:30pm
The Rochester Cathedral Organ series gets off to a great start this Spring, with recitals from internationally renowned organists from cathedrals across the country.
Tickets are £10 on the door, with all under 18’s going free. For more information visit Rochester Cathedral’s website.

HOLY WEEK AND EASTER AT ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL

Palm Sunday: 10 April
08:00 Holy Communion
10:30 The Liturgy of Palm Sunday (procession from La Providence)
15:15 Choral Evensong

Monday to Wednesday
Holy Week: 11 – 13 April
17:30 Services of Readings and Music for Holy Week

Maundy Thursday: 14 April
10:30 The Chrism Eucharist President & Preacher: The Bishop of Tonbridge
20:00 The Liturgy of Maundy Thursday

Good Friday: 15 April
09:30 Choral Mattins
Three Hours Devotion:
12:00 Preaching the Cross Preacher: Canon Neville Emslie, Director of Mission and Ministry, Diocese of Canterbury
13:45 The Liturgy of Good Friday

Easter Day: 17 April
05:30 The Easter Liturgy
08:00 Holy Communion
10:30 The Eucharist of Easter Day Preacher: The Bishop of Tonbridge
15:15 Solemn Evensong, Procession and Blessing of the Easter Garden

All welcome
On occasion we may have to make changes to our advertised service schedule.
Please check our website www.rochestercathedral.org
When you retire, you’ll have reached an incredible milestone of over 40 years in ministry. Eighteen of those have been as Archdeacon. How do you reflect on that?

I think at heart I am still a parish priest, and I have had the opportunity – the most recent one being at Slade Green – to still fulfil that role, even in a very modest way. Therefore, as an Archdeacon I felt very committed to encouraging and assisting other clergy (and their lay team) to be good in this their roles too.

Were you brought up in a Christian household and if not, how did you first come to faith?

Yes, I was, though as a young child my parents were not that regular in attending the local church, though this would change in my early teens when they got seriously involved in our local church. Like many in the 1950s I was sent along to Sunday School and absolutely loved it!

When did it become apparent to you that you had a role to play in the Church?

When I was about 19 I, having been committed as a lay person, started to think about, literally, what Jesus might want me to do with my life, and it was only at that point I, with the encouragement of others, considered the ordained ministry.

Were you always destined for ordained ministry? Did you have other career plans at first?

No. After I left school I joined the Met – then I decided I wanted to make lots of money, so started to work for an international bank and trained to be an accountant, but the Lord had other plans, so after four years I went off to study Theology and train for ministry.

Being an Archdeacon is a tough job. What have you enjoyed about it and what have been the challenges?

The stuff I have enjoyed about being an Archdeacon is giving people permission to get on with things. Sometimes that is about ministry, and sometimes it has been about buildings. I have worked with some wonderful colleagues, and we certainly have had some good times. I think the challenge for me – and probably for most archdeacons – is managing people’s disappointment!

Have you been particularly inspired by someone?

I think the young, male curates (remember women were not ordained in those days) were part of the inspiration that led me to ordination. They were all very different but so wonderfully faithful and open. I was always impressed with Fr Smith’s shiny, well-polished shoes – though there was much more to the man, as I would discover. I still follow his example to this day.

What are you watching at the moment?

I am watching the Hairy Bikers, a wonderful combination of food, travel and bikes! I am also watching the latest series of Death in Paradise and Tipping Point (and wasn’t Line of Duty brilliant!).

When you do have some downtime, what are your favourite things to do?

After 40 years of marriage I still like doing stuff with Jill. Obviously when the weather is good I’m off out on the bike with some mates, and I’ve just taken up swimming again, which I’ve loved since the age of 9.

Is it true you are a bit of a motorbike fan?

Yes, I am a motorbike fan, but certainly don’t try to fix the thing! My first bike I got at the age of 16, then there was quite a gap until my mid-life crisis when I bought my first Harley.

You’ve landed a spot on Desert Island Discs. What’s the one piece of music you would save?

I would like two ‘pieces’: Faure’s Requiem and ELO’s Greatest Hits.

Before you ride off into the sunset, any final words of wisdom for the diocesan family?

Two bits of wisdom: you can still make a difference to those you meet, whatever your role and responsibility in the Church, and finally, one thing I have learned over the years in the various committees and working groups I have been involved in is that, despite the many hours that can be spent, for a good number of those ‘outside,’ nobody cares. I don’t say that with regret, but I like to think with a good dose of realism!
It was an early, damp and overcast Saturday morning, and I was alone in a church car park. My husband needed the car that day, so he had dropped me off early for an event I wanted to attend. I began to wonder if I had the right address as out of each car that pulled up, out stepped a vicar. I certainly was not a vicar and had no plans to become one!

I looked to someone vaguely familiar and whispered, ‘Is this the “It’s Your Calling” open day?’

Five years after that damp morning in the car park (after thousands of words worth of essays!) I was licensed as a Lay Minister.

Little did I know when I gave my life to Jesus in 2008 just how Christ was going to take all I had experienced and use my life story for his purpose. As we were exploring my lay ministry role and the areas in which I could serve, a job opportunity arose with the Christian charity Home for Good in my local area and I was encouraged to apply.

The vision of Home for Good reflects my own story. As a care-experienced adult, I have lived experience of that separation from family, of chaos and uncertainty, of the complexity of being part of a sibling group, and of the to-ing and fro-ing from home to home that so many children and young people endure. My experience in care has made marks on my life. Some of those marks still impact me today.

I was appointed as a Project Worker in 2017 and, four and a half years on, and I have seen God work out of my humanity, with all its fragilities, finding families for children of all ages and making connections with heads of services, carers and with care leavers.

Joining the Home for Good team and making my work with this charity part of my ministry was a natural, exciting and affirming fit.

The way I see it, lay ministry opens up opportunities to those who – like me – may not necessarily suit a traditional route into Church leadership. But we have so much to give.

When I think back to that young girl standing in an empty car park, wondering why on earth she was there, I am so grateful my husband needed the car that Saturday morning. If it had been there, I might have just hopped back in and driven away from the joy and the journey ahead of me.

Jesus meets us in those moments, right where we are, and walks with us to places and experiences we may have never imagined. To those reading this today, thinking, ‘God can’t use me’: Trust me, He can!

- Read more about the work of this charity at: [www.homeforgood.org.uk](http://www.homeforgood.org.uk)
- A longer version of this article originally appeared in Transforming Ministry magazine: [www.transformingministry.co.uk](http://www.transformingministry.co.uk)
This Lent, as we look to embrace justice, we offer this prayer:

Loving God, inspire us to seek justice your way, driven by compassion for all, shaped by your holiness and ready to discover grace in the most unexpected places.

Amen