

# MOSAIC

SEPT - DEC 2024

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**P14** Harvest  
Resources

**P16** Rhythms  
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**P41** Advent Book  
Recommendations



**RAM**

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**T**he seasons are again changing as we move into autumn and then winter. For a lot of people, the agricultural cycle restarts in September with ploughing and drilling, bringing sheep and cattle to market, planning winter animal feeding and tidying the 'edges and hedges' of fields. For many, it feels like a new beginning. In churches, we go from Harvest festivities and celebrations to Advent – a time of anticipation and waiting. As Jon considers on page 24, nature's rhythms teach us valuable lessons. On page 8, we contemplate the prospect of God being in the ordinary and every day, as we are encouraged to become 'detectives of divinity', whilst Jo encourages us to think about slowing down, a much-needed message in this busy season. You will find her insight reflections on page 16.

Among the Network News, you'll encounter stories about supporting Afghan refugees in a Wiltshire village, a unique approach to services on the fifth Sunday of the month in Alnwick, and the possibility of church planting in the Norfolk Broads. In the Cotswolds, Joy, one of the *Missional Listeners* resourced through Rural Ministries, is beginning to reimagine how the current church could be used and the delights of working ecumenically. Harbour Church Dorset, a new church planted due to Ben and Ez's Missional Listening, celebrate more baptisms, whilst the Oatridge family, missionally engaging in North Lincolnshire, is working with the Business Community

and running a weekly co-working event. Reflective Rambles and Hedgerow Communion are some of the latest developments within Abbeydore Deanery, whilst a 'murder mystery evening' is just one of the planned activities at the Life Centre in Milton-Under-Wychwood. If you are still looking for Harvest ideas and Advent reading suggestions, this edition includes helpful links to Harvest resources and three Advent books we commend.

We pray that this edition will inspire you to try something new. Why not join your nearest Rural Hub [see page 11], share your ideas, and hear many more? Our monthly prayer meetings offer a further opportunity to share and be encouraged, and you can find when these occur and how to join in on page 4.

Finally, echoing the words of Paul, may we encourage you all to:

**"Be cheerful no matter what; pray all the time; thank God no matter what happens."**

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-17**

**Revd Simon Mattholie**  
CEO Rural Ministries

# Rural Ministries Prayer Update



“To clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world.”  
Karl Barth

Within the Rural Ministries network, prayer is at the heart of everything we do. Through the monthly prayer diary inserted in MOSAIC we've been regularly praying for staff, volunteers, pioneers and communities who are connected to us. We'd like to encourage you to continue to engage with this essential element of what it means to be a Kingdom movement in our rural regions around the UK.

Earlier this year, we also introduced a monthly prayer meet-up on Zoom. The heart behind this is to support and strengthen individuals

across the movement, and to establish and nurture relationships with other pioneers, church leaders, volunteers and lay workers. This is built upon the firm foundation of regular prayer.

These monthly sessions each look different as we seek to introduce new prayer practices and cultivate intercessory rhythms that you will hopefully find effective and fruitful in your ministry contexts. So far this year, in the hope drawing us closer to God, we have used Biblical Poetry and the Psalms, Lectio Divina, liturgy, listening prayer and journalling; we have prayed for each person present, for the UK elections and for individual missional endeavours.

We are currently meeting on the first Tuesday of each month at 10am. Please consider joining us.

**RAM**  
**Zoom**  
**prayer**

30 minutes to **connect and pray** with others in rural ministry

Monthly: 1st Tuesday: 10am

3rd September    1st October

5th November    3rd December



Scan to join, or go to the link on the home page of our website.

[www.ruralministries.org.uk](http://www.ruralministries.org.uk)



### Durrington Community Church, Durrington, Wiltshire

We have recently been sensing that God is at work in the local infants, juniors and senior schools. We are regularly in all the schools, offering assemblies, mentoring, reading help and lessons, but now the schools are actively asking for help. For the Year 6 students moving on to senior school we held a joint pilgrimage with the Anglican church and one headteacher commented that it was a great experience of churches working together for the benefit of his students. Our local Youth for Christ has asked for our help in a special event they are running in the senior school with years 7 and 9.

There have been some signs of God's Kingdom here in Durrington and barriers are being broken down:

- we have had the opportunity of praying with parents at our after-school club,
- we are working with Afghan refugees teaching English and providing a social meeting point,

- in addition to offering food, a welcoming space and a cuppa, the foodbank is providing an important opportunity for people to chat and offload if they feel the need, leading to some wonderful conversations,
- and our monthly family church is beginning to grow numerically. Barriers are breaking down.

Our hope is that everybody will come to know the Lord and that we will continue to think big. We want spiritual fruit from all our enterprises in Jesus' name. We need more open minds to the gospel. We are concerned, and prayerful, about the future church and for our responsibility in this.

Please pray for more and more opportunities. Please pray against worldliness, for conversation opportunities to go beyond the mundane to the truly spiritual, against personal strongholds in people's lives of self-sufficiency and fear of stepping out in faith away from this.

### BroadGrace, Coltishall, Norfolk

Our church Big Day Out this summer felt like an especially significant one. Despite usually being encouraging times, this year many of our members remarked on the sense of unity and love there was for one another. We had some inspiring and delightful teaching from Ben Slee on the role of singing together as a church and how the Lord gives us this gift so that his word would dwell in us richly (Colossians 3v16).

This love and unity was clear in a presentation and question time with the elders about our hopes to be used by the Lord in planting or revitalising a church in 2025. There is a real sorrow that, if the Lord answers these prayer the way we hope, we will not all be together any more. Alongside this, there was a deep joy at the thought of the

spreading goodness of the Lord in reaching more of the villages of Norfolk.

We have committed ourselves during 2024 as a church family, to pray for us to be actively planning to plant another church in 2025; or to be involved in helping revitalise an existing church. We are still unsure of what the Lord might plan but our day together made crystal clear how he has created a willing spirit among us, and a desire to see Christ's kingdom grow. Please continue to pray over this with us.



### Alwick Baptist Church, Alwick, Northumberland

In recent years we've run an initiative called 5th Sunday where, when there is a fifth Sunday in the month, we ask the church to take their act of worship out into the community on the final '5th Sunday'.

We intentionally scale back resources for a Sunday service so that people use their gifts and passions to bless the community. Our church family has really got on board with this and organised open garden events, prayer walks, a service in a retirement complex and litter picks to name but a few.

We believe that this isn't so much Sunday off as Sunday different.

Following a recent 5th Sunday we gathered and shared fantastic testimonies which we believe made God smile. Not only that but the community takes notice. Our very own Town Council were so impressed with our 5th Sunday 'litter picking posse' that they posted it on the social media page. People responded with surprise and delight.

For me, Chris, and Caroline, as joint pastors, this is all part of the centrifugal nature of mission and being the hands and feet of Jesus in a relevant way in our communities. It's joined up thinking and God stitches it together.

### Great Moulton Evangelical Chapel, Great Moulton, Norfolk

God never intended for any of us to live the Christian life alone. At the mere mention of **community**, people often look upon you as if you have dropped in from another world, smile tolerantly, and hope you change the subject. To avoid thinking about community simply because we misunderstand it will deprive us of one of God's greatest gifts. Community. It is the gift of a rich and challenging life together, one that we need and can receive with joy.

Here at GMC, we are first and foremost friends with one another, kind, compassionate, and generous in hospitality. We serve one another and submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, both in Chapel and community. This list just scratches the surface, but it is enough to remind us that we need the community of faith to grow in Christ. Others have found practical ways, from gardening skills to childcare; some have been buying extra food etc to help our local food bank, thus we grow in stewardship. We have seen people change plans to help others who are unable to do their weekly duty. In whatever ways, community means watching over one another for good, knowing that as we serve, all of us are growing stronger in Christ. Our coffee mornings have regulars attenders and the numbers increased due to the word spreading.

We have had poor health in our congregation, and through prayer we are seeing healing, God is good, and we continue to pray every day for our members and their full recovery.

We look to increase our numbers as more younger families get the opportunity to move to the village with the new homes being built.



## Mount Zion Church, Cliviger, Lancashire

Going Out – Reaching Out – a lesson that God has everything covered.

We are sensing that God is at work in Cliviger. As a loving Christian community, we long for our neighbours and village community to come to know Jesus as their Saviour. Over decades we have reached out, invited in and shared our love, wherever we have seen a need, and indeed we have in the main enjoyed the ‘favour’ of our local community. But more recently, at least ten members of our church family have started regularly attending a weekly coffee and chat session and an armchair exercise session at the local village hall. It is a wonderful example of God going before us and providing a place where we naturally build relationships and enjoy being part of our local community. Without contriving an activity, these

lovely Christian people are sharing themselves and ‘leaking’ their faith in Jesus.

Add to this God given opportunity, our annual tea party for senior village residents, at which had one lady asked, “why are we here?” The answer being because you are family, and we love you. We start to see the bigger picture that God is at work, and we are blessed to be a part of his plan.

We recently had another example of God at work in our community – a health service diabetic group have started to use our community space in church, bringing more local people into God’s House. We ensure there is always a selection of resources available for our visitors to pick up.

Our prayer request: Please pray for eyes to see and ears to hear where God wants us to be in our community and mouths that will speak of God’s love for all.

## Derbyshire Rural Chaplaincy

Over recent months we feel very blessed as we have seen God’s hand creating opportunities for us to broaden our work amongst the farming community.

As with most chaplaincy ministries, taking time to build relationships is key, and we are forever grateful to the farming community who invite us onto their farms and into their homes. Many take us into their confidence about a range of sensitive issues affecting their family and working lives. We do not have all the answers but we are regularly told that taking time to listen is often enough.

As chaplains we also spend time helping out on various farms – relief milking, maintenance work and lambing duties. They bring welcome opportunities to work closely alongside our community and support them practically.

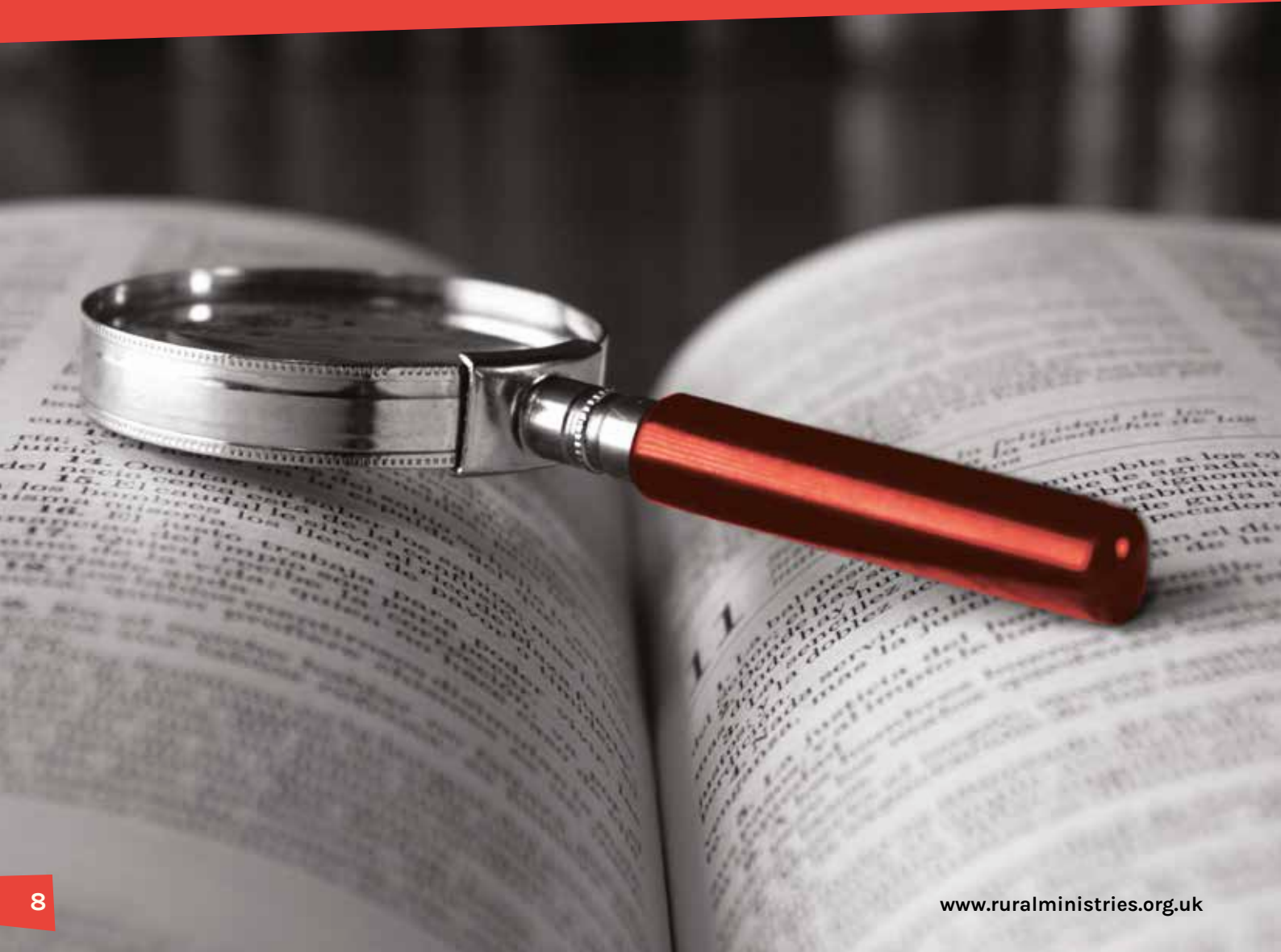
We give God thanks that our monthly short service, held in an anteroom at the local livestock market, is now attracting around 20 people made up of farmers, traders and local Christian supporters.

Please pray that we will build on the contacts we have made at the various agricultural shows over the summer season, and also use the upcoming harvest services and a harvest supper to invite the farming community along where they will hear various Christian testimonies.



# Becoming detectives of divinity

Simon Mattholie, Rural Ministries





A delegate mentioned the phrase ‘detectives of divinity’ at a recent gathering of the Rural Mission hub at Launde Abbey; it originates from Barbara Brown-Taylor’s book, *The Preaching Life*, and as such, caught my attention. As she puts it, “Our spiritual assignment is to collect evidence of God’s presence in our world – to allow our eyes occasionally to be blinded by a heavenly glare that dazzles, to allow our hearts to be strangely warmed and moved by a spiritual passion and hope that defies logic, and to allow our spirits to be disoriented yet energised by encountering Christ’s divinity in the ‘thin places of our lives.’”<sup>1</sup>

Many of us look for the big God moments, the proverbial burning bushes, miraculous provisions and healings, and perhaps yearn for a Cessna sky writing in the clouds, ‘Thus saith the Lord’ to affirm something we suspect might be of God. We want clarity, something we can point to others and say, “See, it is God.” However, could it be that God is speaking and present, much more than we have previously considered, not in Cessnas writing verses in the sky, but amidst the ordinary, routine-filled stuff we rarely are attentive to? So often, I find that the everydayness of my life leads to distraction rather than attention to God. But what if we began to see ourselves as ‘detectives of divinity’, seeking God in the everyday and ordinary? Amidst the supermarkets and putting out the bins, the dog walking, lawn mowing and phone calls, God is there; the question becomes, am I truly paying attention? Barbara Brown-Taylor describes having prayerful attention by suggesting that at some point, we became a “detective of divinity, collecting evidence of God’s genius and admiring the tracks left for us to follow.”<sup>2</sup>

I am fortunate to have four grandchildren, and Bertie, the second eldest, has the gift of curiosity. I have lost count of the leaves,

feathers, worms, snails, stones, and sticks that he has collected over the past year. He observes everything and collects most things – you cannot have a quick dog walk with Bertie; you have to set aside time to enable a collection of stuff from the walk to be brought back for further study. Bertie slows me down and helps me to see – really see, things that I might have walked over or passed by; such is his wonder and curiosity. Perhaps we have something to learn from the Berties of our world.

As we grow older, we tend to lose this innocent wonder. Yet curiosity is integral to both mission and soul care. Curiosity invites us to wonder, “What is God up to in my life? What is God doing in the world?” Curious souls seek to know God and appreciate God’s ways – they become detectives of divinity. Perhaps to reclaim our curiosity, we need to become more like a child, something that Jesus seems to advocate in Matthew’s gospel, where he told us:

**“Whoever becomes simple and elemental again, like this child, will rank high in God’s kingdom”**  
(Matt.18:4 MSG).



Curious souls seek to know God and appreciate God’s ways.

Continued over

<sup>1</sup> Brown Taylor, B. 1993 *The Preaching Life*, pp.15-16

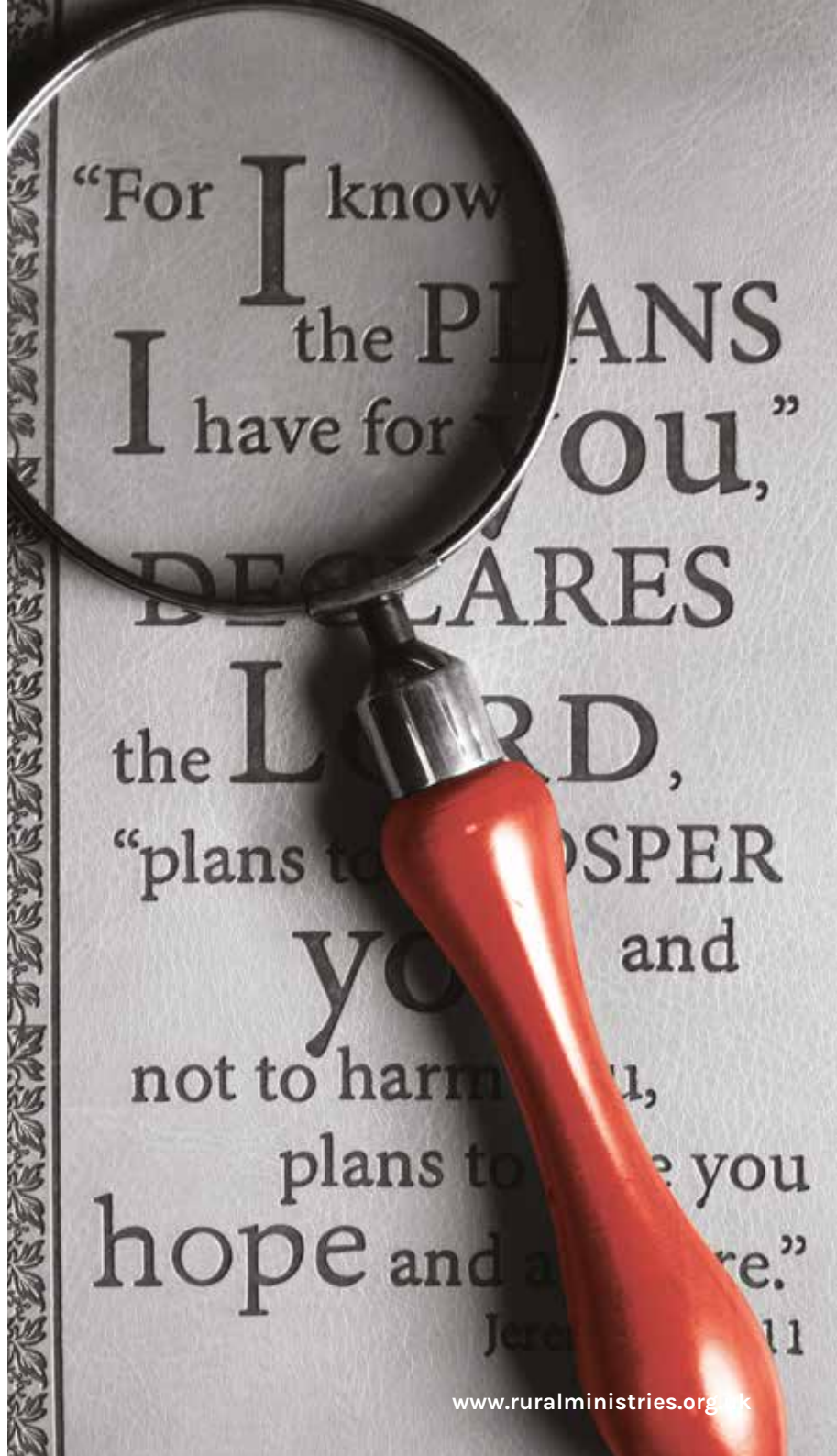
<sup>2</sup> (Ibid)

Curiosity explores what lies beneath the surface and asks questions; it helps us notice and experience God's presence in and around us and discover God's footprints and tracks left for us to follow. Could it be that when Jesus calls us to consider the lily (Matt. 6:28), observe the birds of the air (v. 26), listen to the sound of the wind (John 3:8), and look at the foxes (Matt. 8:20), he is actually inviting us to become detectives of divinity and experience God?

I have previously talked of the concept of 'God leaking out of those of no faith and other faiths' in terms of if humankind is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26), then there is no way a humble human vessel can contain all of God's characteristics. Sometimes, those character traits leak, and we get glimpses of Christ in others. Perhaps a more helpful analogy is linked to the concept of being 'detectives of divinity' and expecting to encounter this regularly, to naturally uncover and become amazed at the voice of God singing through a bird, laughing through a child, smiling through a flower, crying through dead fish in rivers. As far as I understand it, spiritual experiences with God do not require prearranging. God is always present with us. Being a 'detective of divinity' means we begin to increase our awareness of God's presence, opening our spiritual eyes and ears as we walk through nature, at the office, in the home, in the supermarket, or at a sporting event, and become even more aware of the presence and awareness of God who speaks and leaks in our communities.

**"Surely the LORD is in this place,  
and I wasn't even aware of it!"**

Genesis 28:16b (NLT)



# Rural Mission Hubs

Rural Mission Hubs aim to support and encourage pioneers, practitioners, and permission givers, as well as those looking to explore pioneering rural ministry and mission. They are an opportunity to share stories and encouragements, pray together, explore ideas, and listen to God together. It is a gathering of like-minded explorers with an open door to anyone seeking a safe place to be, and as such, invites you to join us on the journey.

Each hub aims to meet two or three times each year and has its own character with no set format.

**Future Rural Mission Hub meeting dates:**

**2024**

**26th- 27th September (residential)**

**Midlands Rural Hub**

Launde Abbey, Leicestershire.

**3rd October**

**East Anglia Rural Hub**

St Etheldreda's Church, Reach, Cambridgeshire.

**7th October**

**Northern England Rural Hub**

Scargill House, Nr Skipton, North Yorkshire.

**8th October**

**North East & Borders Rural Hub**

St Cuthbert's Centre, Holy Island, Northumbria.

**2025**

**12th-13th February (residential)**

**Northern England Rural Hub**

Scargill House, Nr Skipton, North Yorkshire.



For the latest details on  
all the Rural Mission Hubs go to  
[www.ruralministries.org.uk/rural-mission-hubs](http://www.ruralministries.org.uk/rural-mission-hubs)

### Millom Baptist Church, Millom, Cumbria

It has been a very ordinary season in Millom; we continue to do the things we usually do, with coffee mornings on Mondays, toddler group on Wednesdays and a Zumba class on a Thursday (which has been made much more fun since the arrival of a new sound system!). But God is at work in the relationships which we see growing, amongst church members and among friends and community leaders. The moments when someone expresses their growing faith with confidence, the moments that we can offer to support, chat and pray about difficult issues for the local council, and the way we pray for one another – these everyday things bring joy.

We hope for these little signs of love and support growing and spreading like tiny weeds across our town. We pray that the simple stories of God's presence and love will be infectious. And we pray that lives will be changed as more people hear that God is in the everyday.

### Sam & Suzie Abramian, Missional Listeners, Hunstanton, Norfolk

The past season in our lives has been one of renovation, both spiritually and physically, as we bought our first house which needed a lot of work!

It's been a challenging, enlightening and energising season in so many ways. At times we have wondered if we have spent too long on the house and not enough 'doing mission' or at least dreaming of some project and highlighting the big idea God has for our community.

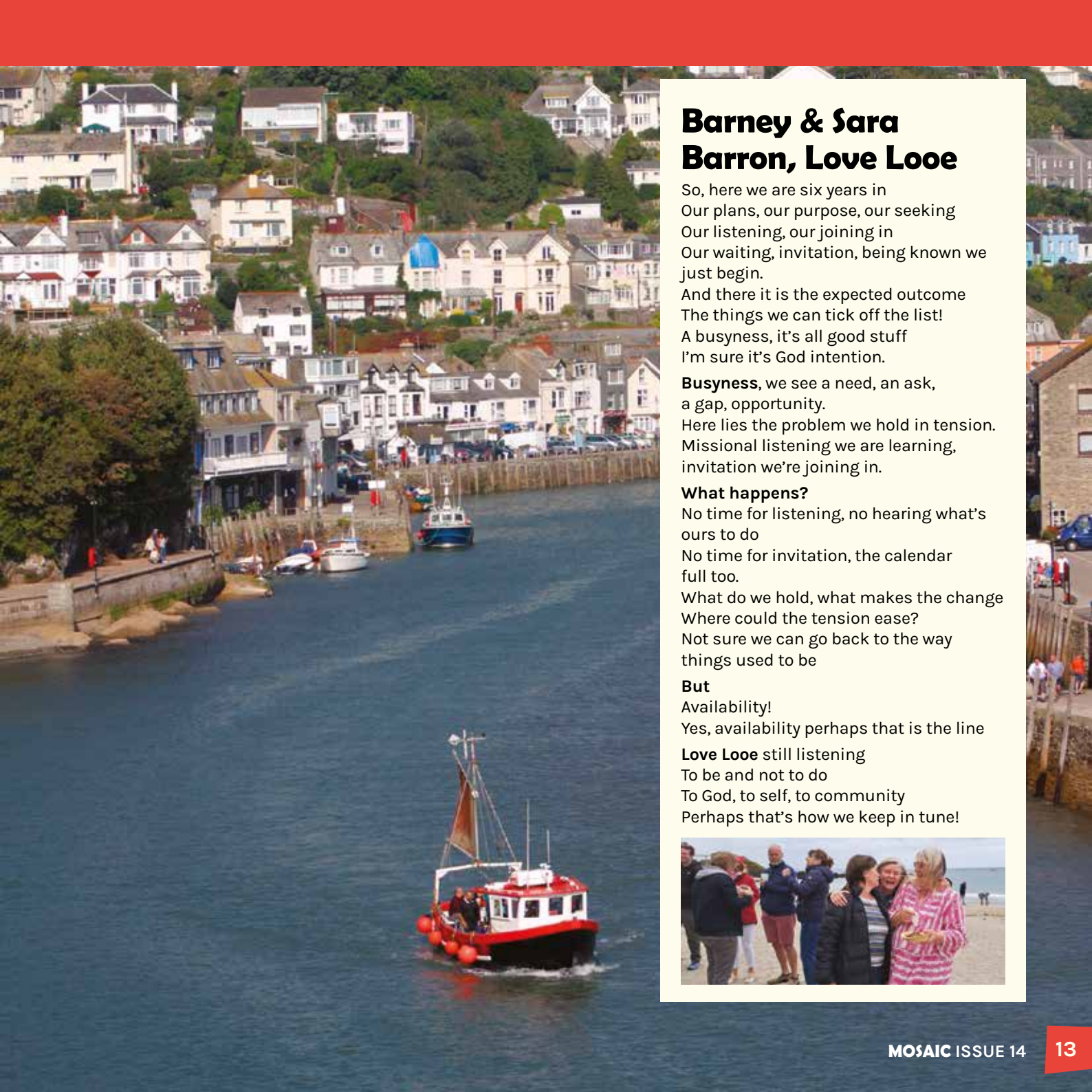
These thoughts were also provoked in talking with a ministry colleague as I (Sam) was talking excitedly about our house renovation when they gently asked the question, "So apart from renovating a house, what ministry are you doing?" The question irked me a little but in the moment, I couldn't put my finger on why.

The next day, I was sanding woodwork and reflecting on the time spent at the house when I started remembering conversations with tradespeople, some of which shared very personal and intimate details about their lives. I also reflected on other friends in the community who have offered time, skills and tools. I then realised; the renovation is the ministry. God was bringing people to us, as they helped us with their practical knowledge and skills, we were there to help them with the care of their souls. In God providing this house, which needed work, he was rooting us deeper in the community and this has continued to be the case.

So, what is God doing in our community? He's rooting us in deeper relationships with people because he is relational. Where will he go with this? We don't know at this moment, but as RM's Jon Timms recently said in a conversation with us, "the purpose of the journey is found in its unfolding nature". God will reveal what his purposes are, but I wouldn't be surprised if it has something to do with reconciliation and healing hearts. We'll let you know as he unfolds our future.







## Barney & Sara Barron, Love Looe

So, here we are six years in  
Our plans, our purpose, our seeking  
Our listening, our joining in  
Our waiting, invitation, being known we  
just begin.

And there it is the expected outcome  
The things we can tick off the list!  
A busyness, it's all good stuff  
I'm sure it's God intention.

**Busyness**, we see a need, an ask,  
a gap, opportunity.

Here lies the problem we hold in tension.  
Missional listening we are learning,  
invitation we're joining in.

### **What happens?**

No time for listening, no hearing what's  
ours to do  
No time for invitation, the calendar  
full too.

What do we hold, what makes the change  
Where could the tension ease?  
Not sure we can go back to the way  
things used to be

### **But**

Availability!

Yes, availability perhaps that is the line

**Love Looe** still listening

To be and not to do

To God, to self, to community

Perhaps that's how we keep in tune!



# Harvest Resources

Our society and our farming practices have changed a lot since Rev Robert Hawker invited parishioners to a special thanksgiving service in 1843 but the basic principle of giving thanks to God for His generous provision, and for those working to produce the food we eat, remains the same.

There are many resources available to help us put together a contemporary and relevant Harvest Festival, but Rural Ministries has assembled a collection of some of our favourites. You can download, or find out more about, each of the resources from our website [www.ruralministries.org.uk/harvest](http://www.ruralministries.org.uk/harvest)



## Harvest Resources: Agricultural Festivals pack Diocese of Chelmsford

This 14-page document provides a key service liturgy plus ideas for a primary school visit and a youth group session.



## Trussell Tables: A Harvest resource for churches The Trussell Trust

This resource from Trussell Trust (best known for running foodbanks around the UK) contains ideas based on the amount of time you have to prepare, ranging from a simple foodbank collection table, through to an afternoon of shared cooking and eating with your wider community.



## Harvest Worship Church Service pack Engage Worship

This pack from our friends at Engage Worship contains three service plans and resources for harvest time which can be used over three years (if you are following the Lectionary) or as a three-week series.



## Harvest 2024 Resources Pack All We Can

Resources exploring All We Can's theme for the year of 'Charity Begins at Home'. Includes a full service outline, sermon notes, videos, children's/Sunday school activity, all-age activity, prayers etc.



## Resources for the Celebration of Harvest Festival

**Farming Community Network**  
Thirty-four pages full of useful ideas including themes, celebration enhancements, readings, prayers, liturgy, short talks and songs.



## Messy Harvest with Christian Aid Messy Church

Messy Church teamed up with Christian Aid to produce this six-page resource. Perfect for Messy Church but also brilliant for any children or all age service.

## Other useful organisations

### Green Christian



A variety of harvest resources are available online including alternative liturgy for Harvest in Climate Emergency.

### A Rocha UK



Not Harvest specific, but A Rocha produce a lot of material that could be used at harvest.

Links to all these resources and organisations are at [www.ruralministries.org.uk/harvest](http://www.ruralministries.org.uk/harvest)



## Coastal Roots Community, Perranporth, Cornwall



Here on the beaches of Cornwall we are seeing God at work through those who are fighting to look after his creation, fighting for climate justice issues, campaigning against sewage and cleaning the beaches. We sense him working through the local volunteers who get involved in our toddler group, serving families, setting up toys and serving teas and coffees.

We have also seen local families excited about the Scripture Union beach mission that came to town for two weeks this summer and the opportunities to connect with their

children through fun and God stories. We are seeing local Christians helping to build God's kingdom here by getting involved in the parish council, working at the local library, running the toddler groups and volunteering in the schools. And people are asking questions - we were recently interviewed by a local author writing and researching about the healing power of water with an opportunity to share what the Bible and Jesus says about water and healing... Following recent youth and adult Alpha Courses we see people asking questions, seeking, searching for peace and wholeness.

Most of our baptisms are held in the sea but we recently had a baptism in the hot tub at our ladies' weekend away.

We are dreaming of starting new prayer spaces in the local primary school - please pray for favour and opportunity. Pray for the team to come together to run this. We long for the day when our local kids encounter God at school in a reflective space and not just through attendance at church events and missions.

We dream about having a prayer room in a local community space, a third space or local business... all in God's perfect time. We long to see people turn to Jesus in prayer, encountering him through creativity, stillness and contemplative spaces.



A woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a red top and a dark jacket, is riding a bicycle on a wooden ramp. The background consists of blurred wooden bleachers, suggesting motion. The overall image is in black and white, with the woman's top and the text being the only color elements.

# Slow Church

Jo Allen, Rural Ministries



It's a 30 minute cycle through traffic followed by 15 minutes through countryside until I'm home. My head is bursting with all the things I've just learnt, the relationships I've been building, my family back home, all the decisions I have to make for church life and my family, and then I start wondering what's for dinner. All the while regretting my eco life choice to cycle because I really didn't have 45 minutes to spare, it makes each turn of the pedals as I struggle up the hill into the countryside more painful. I then hit the calm country road, and my brain breathes again. God reaches inside my busy mind and body to say "Hey, what's up? Let's go through this", and as I cycle I share it all with God, each issue one-by-one. I get the image of God in front of me, taking each issue I throw at him and placing them in files, some of which he throws away, some he places in a cabinet for later and some he opens up in front of me. Whatever pace I'm going at, God has the ability to help me slow down and concentrate on what matters, and rural places seem to help me let the breath of the Spirit into my busy life.

So much of our world and our church lives are done at a rapid pace, how we cook our food, our travel, our meetings, the clothes we buy, how we receive the news... the list is endless. We've been raised in a culture where being busy, fast and full is successful. Our fast-paced life, filled with individualism and consumerism has changed society. In a lecture on political theology and the welfare state, Nick Spencer highlighted that there are new issues that our welfare state needs to address now that were not present when it was first created: low-paid workers, loneliness, mental ill health, and relationship education. Our fast pace life is one of the major causes of these four issues in our society, and you'll not be surprised to hear that one solution offered in the lecture room was monasticism. I'm not suggesting we all create monastic communities, but we need to consider the human connection, care and depth of spirituality offered in such communities.

A slowness in our faith isn't new. I'm sure the 40 years in the desert felt like forever for the Israelites, let alone the years and years of



oppression and the 400 years of silence. Then there's the long trajectory of scripture with it's a slow-moving narrative over centuries that

has left us in the in-between state of the now-and-not-yet of God's kingdom. There's a lot of slowness in scripture and even more in the hum drum normality of life that isn't recorded in scripture.

Slowness as a way of life in the church and the world has become a hot topic; in 2014 John Pattison and C. Christopher Smith wrote 'Slow Church' which highlights how we as Christians can be witnesses in this fast-paced world to a better, slower way. They state that "slow movements... compel us to ask ourselves tough questions about the ground our faith communities have ceded to the cult of speed." (p15), and say that "slow church is a call for intentionality, an awareness of our mutual independence with all people and all creation, and an attentiveness to the world

around us and the work God is doing in our very own neighbourhoods." (p16) Slowing down allows us to see the world, each other and God, and allows us to participate in God's good work.

How does slowing down work in our rural mission context?

There are many areas that I could write about, but for the purpose of this article I want to focus on the slowing down of leadership and mission in our rural context.

Leadership: Leaders often say to me that they have no time to slow down. Yes, slowing down costs us time, but we need to be bold enough to do it. It's not selfish, it's the opposite, it's life giving, which spills over to your church

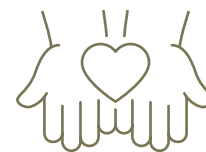


and your community. We all need healthy leaders. One way I do it is by prioritising my creative prayer space in my diary every week and saying no to anything that wants to fill that time. When I have a new idea, I look at the diary and the rotas and instead of adding it onto my already manic week I look at what needs to go to make it happen or who I can hand it over to. I know that if I'm getting overwhelmed, I need to take a slower day that week, so that I don't copy the pattern of this world and keep pushing myself to burnout. This means that I need to create capacity for rest and recovery in my diary. And when I'm spending my year missionally listening and everyone would rather me get on with doing something, I stick to my guns and listen until God reveals his plans. It can be difficult when leaders who have gone before us have

modelled a workaholic lifestyle that everyone around us expects us to copy. But we need to stand our ground and learn the word 'no'. Let's not be led by the fast-paced world we are in, let's be led by the Spirit. What can you put down so that you have space to breathe and hear God in your week?

**Mission:** Slowing down allows us to notice what God is doing and join in, so rather than putting another event on and hope that people will attend, we prioritise people and what God may be doing in our communities. At the heart of slowing down is a profound commitment to community through being and listening. We can be great at this in our rural context because village life is all about being together in community. This helps us work with each other for the good of the community and to God's glory, like a café for those who are lonely, the clothes rack for those unable to afford something to wear, the agape meal including everyone at God's table, the local kitchen garden helping the community to grow healthy and eat locally produced food. A slower theology of mission encourages us to not only listen and notice more, but to act in ways that treasure the earth we live in and love the very people God has called us to live with.

Slowing down is not merely about doing less, but about doing more of what truly matters. It invites us to be present, and to engage deeply with God, each other, and the world. In embracing the principles of a slower Church, communities can rediscover the richness of Christian life and witness, offering a powerful counter-narrative to the hurried existence that defines much of contemporary society.



**Slowing down is not merely about doing less, but about doing more of what truly matters.**



### **EFC Christian Fellowship, Sutton-on-Sea, Lincolnshire**

As a church we are hopeful for the future as we grow. Our local churches are working well together and we, as a small church, are actively involved as we seek to be more relevant in the community. The local area has many new projects including a new sports centre, a large new building overlooking the sea with a restaurant and many new homes being built. We pray that we can be used by God with all the changes taking place. We believe God is moving, not only in our fellowship but in bringing the churches together in unity, although we know that many will not embrace this.

We are praying as a church that we will experience and see changes that will stir us up, spiritually, to be more proactive and that new people are called to support us as a local body of Christ. In our recent Bible study looking at the seven churches in Revelation we are finding out what God requires from us and the things God warns us about. We hope to centre on him and to become more passionate for prayer, the Word, our gifts, and not to lose our first love by being humble, committed and spiritual. For our community we are hoping that people will see that the Christian community is active, relevant and that we bring a message that brings hope with the Good News of Jesus and that more and more will decide to turn to our wonderful Saviour.

### **Open Blue, Calne, Wiltshire**

We are looking forward to our After School Club Wellington Place starting back for a new school year. The past nearly-a-year's outreach at these MOD residential quarters has gone really well. We have served up to fifteen different children over the time with eight of them visiting our club most weeks. The four mothers of these eight children usually stay for the session, enjoying time to chat among themselves, building community and giving us an opportunity to get to them. Each week we provide a couple of craft activities, something the children can cook and eat and, if the weather is good enough, they can enjoy themselves in the garden too.

One recent craft activity was to make a bug magnifying glass kit and then the children had a great time using it to look at minibeasts and plants they could find in the garden. We have used the craft activities to introduce bible stories and at key festivals such as Christmas and Easter we have given out the Bible Society children story books.

It is a real joy to serve this community showing them the love of Jesus. Each week the children rush through the door, obviously pleased to be joining us, and usually throw their arms around the nearest volunteer.

It is still early days but over the last year community has been built, families have been served and the love of Jesus has been shown.





## Parkview Chapel, Botesdale, Suffolk

Linda and Sheila are two ladies, unknown to each other, but who have two things in common. Firstly, they are both recent additions to our community, having just moved into some new housing. Secondly, we have seen them at Parkview at different things because they have been invited. There is nothing too unusual in this, except that the people who invited them are not part of 'the Church,' indeed they are not even Christians. What an example this sets us!

I wonder if our God can, and is, using others to do his work? If so, then thanks to God being at work through other people, one of these ladies is certainly on a journey to God's Kingdom.

I look at our community as a whole and wonder where the real hope is? I dream that one day the whole community will understand what hope actually is. But I have realised that for people just to come along and join what we call Church, and ultimately to have faith in God, is a too big a jump for them.

We have to meet them where they are. Yes, there are many ways that we are already involved in our community, but do we need to be more intentional about our faith? There are also areas in our community where we are not involved in, so we need to work out how we can change that. Pray that God will show us the answers to these things.

Also, shortly Harvest, Remembrance and even Christmas will be upon us. These are such big opportunities for us to let God use us, wherever in the community that may be. Please pray that He will and then that we will.

## Joy Dimond, Missional Listener, Stow, Gloucestershire

God is at work in Stow through building community; friendship groups (through the community cafe); support networks (Dementia Cafe); by connections with those that are lonely, bereaved, marginalised. Through opportunities at the local primary school; serving as a governor and pupil support volunteer also by running a well-being group with pupils. Even though this is not a church school, input is fully supported and celebrated.



The local vicar and I set out once a month into the community with 'Biscuits and Blessings'. We have had a very warm welcome, we mostly engage with business owners and shop staff. We have prayed for the bereaved, the newly married, for healing. The printed blessings, randomly selected by the people we meet, have spoken into situations and provided comfort when needed.

Working together with my Anglican colleague we are able to pray together for Stow, and for each other, understanding the context (and the challenges) of the town in which we dwell.

Our hopes and dreams for Stow are for more opportunities to connect with community members; that the hidden hardship, which is often not acknowledged (in a tourist town), is addressed. We hope too for truly affordable housing provision.

We pray: for progress with the re-imagining of the Baptist Church building into a place for community, for vision and funding; for protection, wisdom and rest; for the staff and pupils at the primary school as they begin their new academic year; for more opportunities to share God's love with our town.

### Abbeydore Deanery, Herefordshire

Our 'alternative' worship ways seem to be well received and we see God at work in this and other areas. Reflective Rambles are gaining popularity and maintaining a core membership, some of whom are becoming more involved, either by e.g. leading reflections on the rambles, or with others from the group attending more traditional services. The regular Hedgerow Communion are attended mainly by non-churchgoers and a couple of recent anecdotes include: "It's the first time I've felt comfortable about taking bread and wine since I was baptised" and "Could I be baptised at a hedgerow communion"

The Golden Valley Pilgrim Way continues to burgeon with pilgrims coming from across the UK and beyond and is a sign of God's Kingdom. By offering a welcome to those from farther afield, the local community is also seeing a more welcoming local church. We share the hope of a recent pilgrim who prayed that this would continue to thrive and be as great a blessing to the churches who host pilgrims, as to the pilgrims themselves.



Our hope is that we will have hearts for mission and service for the community around us and not be not restricted by traditional services and patterns.

Please pray for the energy of our volunteers and give thanks for their faithfulness and commitment. Pray too that more volunteers will come forward and be drawn to deepen their faith through actions. We also ask for wisdom to navigate structural and strategic matters.

### Harbour Church, Dorset

We are feeling blessed here in Dorset. All the small Christian communities that are part of Harbour Church came together to celebrate the baptism of Gracie, one of our young people, followed by the surprise baptisms of Pheobe (another young person) and her mum, Heidi. Our network of small Christian communities across Dorset is growing, and it has been great working with people from all different (and some no) church backgrounds.

Our aim as a network is to equip disciples to bring Christian light in their day to day lives, and we are excited that God is calling people onto the front line to serve the most vulnerable, on fostering panels, with social work and a myriad of different ways. We are thankful for the prayer and support from Rural Ministries and ask you to pray alongside us as the entire network embarks on a month of prayer and fasting in September.



## ReBorne Sherborne & Milborne Port, Dorset

So, summer is coming to its end, but hopefully good weather will extend into autumn.

We have seen God at work through our regular mission activities, and we pray this continues through the autumn as we celebrate God's goodness in His provision for us. Our inter-generational mission activities: Truth be Told, Coffee Stop, and our care home ministries at Abbey View and Trinity Manor, all continue to give us the opportunity to spread the good news of Jesus and build relationships that allow us to reach into the lives of our friends with prayer and support as many go through storms of life.

This autumn we will be in the process of finishing off the refurbishment of our Milborne Port building and gradually moving mission activities back in there. The villagers are looking forward to activities and the usual Mum's Meals and Christmas activities (though not quite there yet!).

We are praying that we can build on the links with the young people who went to Spree South West, near Exeter, in June and pray that links with them will continue as they go to secondary school.

We are looking forward to our church weekend in October and linking with YFC for a youth event in the evening. We pray that our links in the school and the community youth clubs will encourage young people to attend and explore this amazing opportunity.

Our mission remains the same, to reach our community, build relationships, build on those relationships, and help these friends encounter Jesus, who is the way truth and the life. As we hold fast to Biblical truth, we know that we need to focus on everything we do being for God's kingdom in a way that speaks to those around us.

## Mount Pleasant Church, Grovesend, Swansea

Although at face value it still would seem that we are a declining church and our Sunday attendance still isn't where we'd like it to be, but we believe God has a plan for this community.

We have a coffee morning twice a month that has regular attenders, a youth group and a beautiful link with the local Residential Home, Llys-y-Twysog, where we provide a Sunday Service and a midweek devotional. We are also part of the Bont Elim Open the Book team and regularly go into two local primary schools.

We have recently put in an application to become part of the Elim Network which will be decided upon in September

by Elim Presbytery. Both our Pastors are members of Bont Elim Community Church, one of which is an Ordained Elim Minister so we felt this was the best way to move forward and become part of a bigger organisation.

We are still waiting on the paperwork for charity status of our Community Hub, to be able to build an extension on the back of the building for use by all the community. We truly believe that God wants Mount Pleasant to be a light in the community of Grovesend.

Please pray that there would be a thirst for the things of God in Grovesend, we so desperately want to serve this community and build God's Kingdom here.



# Rhythms of Nature

Jon Timms, Rural Ministries



I love the beauty and wildness of the natural world, and around the south-east corner of Scotland where I reside, there is “no lack of wildness” (John Muir – The Story of My Boyhood and Youth). The North Sea is a beautiful, yet sometimes tempestuous, ever-present companion in my home of Dunbar. Pine forests give way to saltmarsh and sand dunes, migrating birds rest awhile on the abundant shorelines and estuaries. Coastal flatlands give way to undulations in the landscape as the Lammermuirs roll slowly towards the south and through the borderlands. It is here that the much-loved Northumbrian missionary St Cuthbert spent his early years as a shepherd.

There is synergy here. Seasons come and go and nature finds a kind of symphonic flow. It instinctively knows what to do. As the Psalmist says, ‘the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your (God’s) work’ (Psalm 104:13b).

At the time of writing, summer is in full bloom. The colour of wild flowers, light from the high sunshine, and the green fullness of the deciduous trees fill every scene. But this doesn’t last forever, though some folks would like it to. Leaves must change colour and branches must loosen their grip and allow the leaves to fall. Winter will come when nature appears to lie in wait for another round of abundant life, the deep rest that’s so evident here in Northern Europe. What appears to be death is just part of the cycle. Winter is long in Scotland, (especially after spending so many years in Cornwall) but life waits in pregnant anticipation just beneath the surface. Though winter has its own unique beauty, it is the hope of spring that enables us to sojourn through the bleakness and long dark nights with hope. Snowdrops are early reminders that we can live with expectation for colour and fullness to once again return


“We live our lives before the wild, dangerous, unfettered and free character of God”

Walter Brueggemann

to nature. Then, a short while later, the first buds begin to appear, and nature slowly wakes up and reemerges.

Early converts to Christianity in these Celtic lands found it easy to relate to a Creator God. They already lived close to the land and its rhythms and cycles, and so engaged with a God who they believed created it all and could be seen through it. Psalm 19 says that the heavens “pour forth speech”, the beauty and wonder in the skies declaring God’s infinite Glory. These Celtic Christians, many of whom would be illiterate, described creation as the ‘big book’ and scripture as the ‘little book’, God speaking through both.

I wonder what these rhythmic, seasonal cycles can tell us about God? Or what is God saying through them?




In the Bible's wisdom literature, we find the book of Ecclesiastes, where we read the familiar words, "For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven" in chapter 3. It seems that the big book and the little book are trying to tell us something. Perhaps there is a flow to life and the invitations of God that we should pay attention to.

So, let's go back for a minute. Way back in the beginning, we were put in a garden, a place of distinct and pure beauty. There was unbroken union with God.....until we broke it! But this doesn't take away the fact that we're made for Eden, and that one day we will have Eden again. In this space between two Edens we're constantly on the search for God, whether we can acknowledge that fact or not. We're always searching for love, for meaning, for acceptance and validation. We try everywhere and everyone else and while they might bring momentary satisfaction, eventually they don't live up to our hopes, and so we seek this elusive essence elsewhere. But God continues to whisper to us. In the depths of our spiritual winters, it could be through the wee snowdrop who reminds of the fullness that is to come, that colour breaks through the grey and that fragile beauty breaks through the hard ground once again.

The cycle of death and resurrection in nature, but also in the passion of Jesus on the cross and in the empty tomb, reminds us of our 'place in between' and our invitation to always find life and the presence and activity of God here, whatever the season. Perhaps our spiritual winters could be reimagined. Maybe God isn't silent, maybe His silence is communicating another message that we need to hear; maybe the lack of fruit isn't the absence of God's blessing but the reminder that if we release control God might be able to work beneath the surface, preparing the soil and the seed; maybe the changing of the colour of leaves (the early stages of change in life) is an invitation to loosen our grip, to allow things to fall away, perhaps their time is done and now it is time to make way for something new.

In whatever spiritual season we may find ourselves living through, God always goes before you, He makes a way through any wilderness and through every season; Jesus calls us to follow him, learn from him and walk with him; and the Spirit is the ever-present activity, wisdom and counsel of God. Each one of these spiritual seasons we are led into are in the service of cultivating deep union with God. This underpins everything we do.





It's always worth acknowledging the presence of God through it all, with a couple of questions/prompts. Prayerfully consider these questions and perhaps you could journal your thoughts and response...

- **Be honest about the season you're in.** Where are you discerning the invitations from the Lord? Are you being led to open pastures of abundance, or to still waters of reflection? Are you in a fallow season with beneath-the-surface growth, or are you bearing fruit in the fullness of summer?
- **Are you grasping onto a particular season, finding comfort and control there?** What would it take to simply let go and follow the way of God's seasonal leading in your life and ministry?
- **Perhaps you have lost hope in the coming of a restored Eden.** Ask God to restore hope in you, for eyes to see, ears to hear and a willing heart to trust in His overwhelming, steadfast love for all He has made.
- **Read the Brueggemann quote from the beginning of this article.** What stirs in you as you reflect on this? Do you know God in this way? Is this One who you could follow wholeheartedly?



### Bawtry Community Church, Bawtry, South Yorkshire

Although it is almost a year since I became Pastor of Bawtry Community Church, I am still new to the area, and learning to identify where God is at work in our community. I have seen hostility covered with the veneer of politeness at times, but more often merely disinterest when it comes to Christianity.

Recently however, as our Family and Community worker was leaving us, we looked back over her five years with us, to see what God has done and we are so grateful for what he has accomplished through her. She has run the village toddler group, provided community activities, and has worked with the over 60's and our local schools. However, one thing that stands out is that she was able to start a youth group for teenagers who were hanging out on the street opposite her house. They were mostly unchurched, but some were willing to engage in Bible study.

We have seen God raise up new leadership to take her place. I have seen God's Kingdom working in the hearts of these leaders, who both have busy jobs and family, as they sacrifice time for a ministry that can be frustrating and thankless.

Looking forward we would love you to pray that this work continues, for the leadership team that they would grow and have joy in their ministry, and that the teenagers would come to know Jesus.

Please pray too that God would help us as a church to reach men in 30's and 40's, as I feel this is a group that often are the most unreached.

### Gosberton Baptist Church, Gosberton, Lincolnshire

Way back in 1666, a bunch of Christians got together in Gosberton to form a Baptist Church. In those days non-conformity was still illegal; but eventually they were allowed to have their own building, not in the heart of the village, but on the very edge of it. Even now people remark "I never knew you were here." So, one of our tasks is to become more visible.

We used to be almost exclusively a Sunday-morning-only user of our chapel. Now, one of our priorities is for our building and our members to become better known in our community.

Our local medical centre takes seriously the use of social prescribing to help people whose needs are not for medicine, but for company, stimulation and friendship. They contacted us and now their walking group uses our chapel as a base, and in various ways we are getting to know this growing group of walkers. More recently a close relative of two of our

members, who is employed by a mental health charity, has encouraged us to support the 'Men's Shed' project. Following a well-attended meeting to promote the concept, a small group is meeting twice weekly. Our Meeting House is wholly unsuitable for all the creative work they would like to do but an answer to prayer may be imminent.

We've identified a piece of land, with a huge and solidly built shed, which was originally purchased by our District Council for a commendable community facility which they can no longer afford to create. Negotiations are ongoing!

We're not pretending that this is evangelism. But we are building bridges, making friends, and contributing to the health and wellbeing of our neighbours. It's a big step in the right direction. Please pray for us.



## St Andrews Community Church, Craven Arms, Shropshire

Life here at St. Andrews has continued along the path of being led by the will of God. A year ago, we intended to actively look for a part-time Pastor and some of our first steps into this were times of corporate prayer in the Church.

We were blessed at this time with a new member at St. Andrews who was a retired ordained minister, who didn't want to be our Pastor, but was very happy to take on the role of being a regular speaker for us at our services. After more prayer, it was realised that God had brought Ken to us and thus the quest for a Pastor was put on hold.

The foodbank that we established opposite the church building continues to be a God sent opportunity to spread the word of God alongside meeting the physical needs of our community.

The vision that we had two years ago to improve our Church premises has at last come to fruition, Praise the Lord! As I write, we are in the process of moving into temporary accommodation for six months, to allow the builders full access. The project has given us a fraught time, but God has been with us. He has made it all possible by overcoming obstacles, providing funding, and most of all, being the Lord in whom we can trust to be there for us at all times.

## Fenlands Church, Tydd Gote, Cambridgeshire

Throughout the year we have been running a community tearoom/ café, with cakes and meals available to anyone who drops in. There is a dedicated team of people who cook, serve and clear up and this has been a positive way to interact with members of our community. In addition to this, prior to food being served, we have a two-hour craft session, to help draw in more people.

There are few local resources for young people and for a number of years we have been providing a youth group which meets once a week. It is open to any young person and they don't need to be a church member or part of a church family.

On alternate months we hold a 'Ladies Evening' and many people from the community come to this, as well as women from the fellowship and other local churches. There is always a 'talk' and there is always food to share.

We love to serve our community and our hope and prayer is that we will see people start asking questions about Jesus, conversations taking place, and people accepting Christ as their Saviour.



### James & Ruth Neve, Chapel-en-le-Frith, Derbyshire

*“Build houses and settle down ... also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”*

So says Jeremiah to the exiled community of Israelites in Babylon; in other words, “get stuck into your local community and bless them!” And one of the things that we have intentionally tried to do since we moved to this large village / small town is stay local. So, for example:

- when we needed to have some redecoration and repairs done following a water leak in our house, our first port of call was our near neighbour ‘H’ who puts his hand to almost anything in and around property maintenance. H is now welcome in our home in less professional circumstances (!) and now is a friend.
- we, intentionally, have not ‘commuted’ to a large or vibrant church which might have been attractive, but stayed in-village, in the small local parish church and have done what we can to serve them.

In our hearts and minds, the overarching intention behind this has been to become embedded in our community with the hope that in whatever circumstances we encounter, we might be a blessing to others.

The village awoke recently to the news of a tragic and violent death. It was H’s 19-year-old son who had died. In small ways we have been able to offer comfort to H – he knows that we are ‘there’ for him. And whilst this may seem very small when compared to other circumstances that people and groups experience, we are glad that we are here seeking good for our local community, alert to what happens and able, in some small way, to respond by seeking to bring the kingdom of God near to those around us.

### Dorset Youth for Christ

In our work as Dorset Youth for Christ’s School Life Pastor, Sam Mead, is present in several schools across West Dorset, and is sensing God’s active presence through notable changes among the young people he mentors. He has seen a remarkable decrease in disciplinary issues, highlighting God’s transformative influence. With mental health issues prevalent among youth, early intervention through mentoring allows us to tackle anxiety and other challenges. Jesus said in Matthew 6:34, “So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.” This verse resonates as we help students focus on the present.



We see signs of God’s kingdom in the compassion and dedication of the teachers. In Sam’s unique role as a School Life Pastor, he sees genuine care and support for even the most challenging students, reflecting Jesus’ vision of loving the least, the last, and the lost.

Our hope is that we can foster significant growth among both teaching staff and young people. We dream of creating spaces where God’s kingdom can be experienced, enriching our community with deeper connections, and understanding.

As we continue our dynamic work in rural West Dorset, we request prayers for the deepening of relationships and the ability to navigate the schools’ evolving needs. Please pray that these connections grow stronger and more meaningful in the upcoming year, reflecting God’s love and purpose.



## **Cromhall Chapel, Cromhall, Gloucestershire**

One of the most noticeable things about our church is the love and care everyone has for each other. There is wonderful unity and new people are made very welcome.

Our prayer is that more people from our village and the surrounding areas would come to know Jesus and be part of us. We have seen a lot of local people coming regularly to our coffee mornings and men's and ladies' breakfasts and, encouragingly, a few joining us regularly on Sundays. The biggest change for us recently was when our Sunday School grew from one child to five children in a couple of weeks!

One of our elders leads the assembly in the local school each week and this is having a big impact on the local children - we pray that some of them and their families will want to join us.

## **Waypoint Church, Berwick-upon-Tweed**

An eighteen-year-old in our Church, who we baptised in the sea last year, who we are training up as a worship leader, told us she had started to gather friends on the beach to worship, read the Bible, and pray together. An elderly couple from Seahouses, contacted us trying to find out if there are any opportunities for Youth connecting in our area. God is starting something with the young people, we feel God has called us for such a time as this to partner with Him.

We feel Holy Spirit leading us to start a monthly Friday evening 'Immerse Service'. It will be a place for growth

## **Epping Green Chapel, Epping Green, Essex**

As pastor I am still fairly new to the village but taking assemblies at the local CofE School is getting us involved in the community. I have also accepted the invitation to be a school governor. Please pray that the Lord would allow us to share the gospel with the teachers, the children and their families.

The church is located in a rural community right on a main road connecting two towns. Unfortunately, parking is limited, making entry difficult. The Lord mercifully gave us parking across the street from a closed pub. I've seen our fellowship pray more and embrace discipleship, but we're in transition.

My vision for the church and community is to reflect Christ's love and serve one another. Please pray for us that the Lord would give us opportunity to share his good news and that he will give me a tiny 'way in' to talk about him wherever I go.

through equipping, empowering and mobilisation. Where young people and adults don't just engage in passionate praise and worship, but can also be trained and released into different areas of ministry. We are including young people in the planning, in the publicity, in the serving teams, and in leading. We believe that young people are reinforcements for today and not tomorrow's replacements! That we need to empower them rather than entertain them.

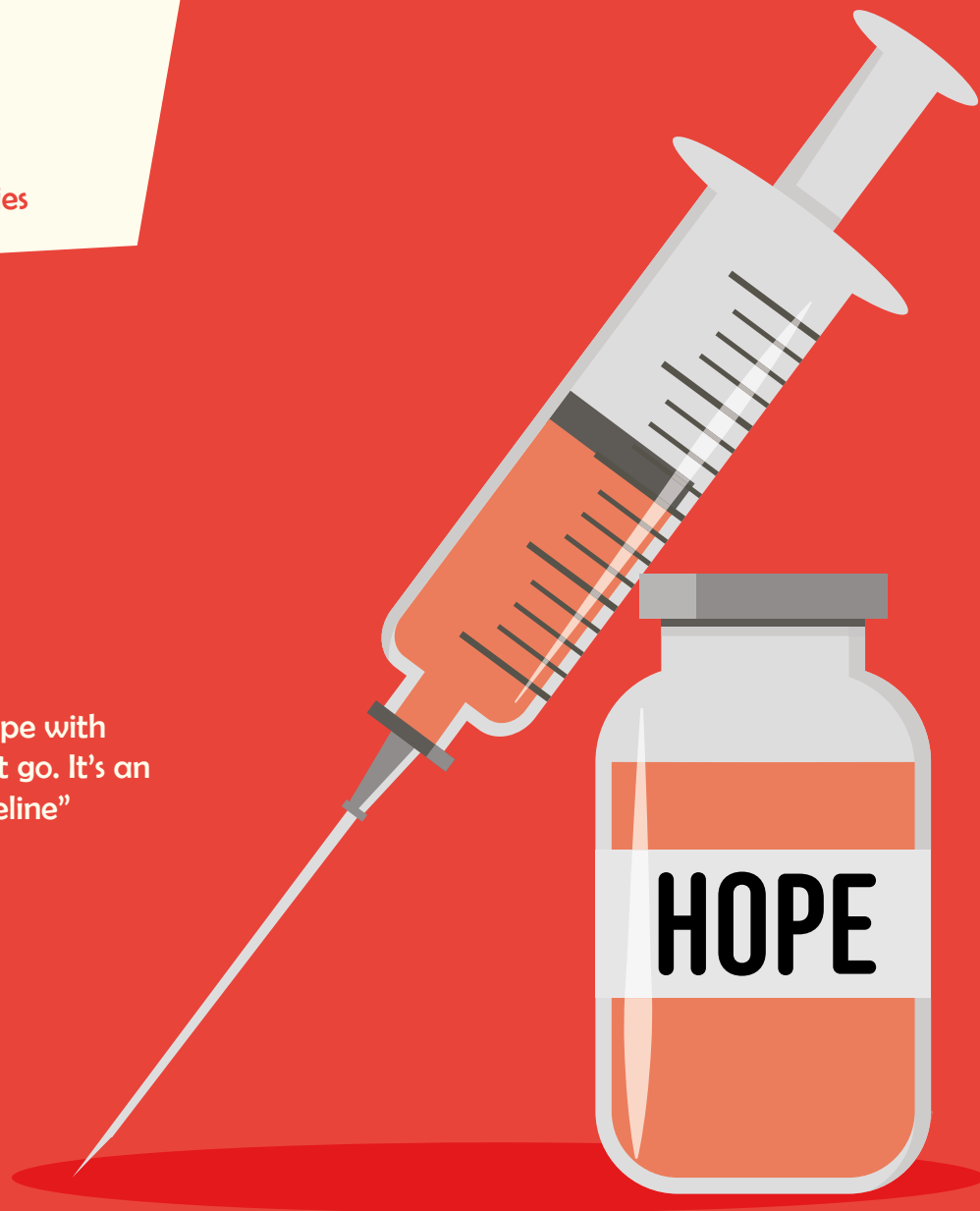
Please pray for us as we step into this new adventure with God, for wisdom and strength, and that God will draw in many young people who will be transformed by His love.

# Hope

Jon Timms, Rural Ministries

“....grab the promised hope with both hands and never let go. It's an unbreakable spiritual lifeline”

(Hebrews 6:18 The Message).



**One quick glance around our world or our news feeds and you'd be forgiven for holding the belief that there's a serious shortage of hope right now. Wars, poverty, famine, climate crisis, a mental health crisis, housing crisis, human rights violations – we could use a serious injection of hope.**

Hope is one of the three great treasures of the human heart – “Three things will remain, faith, hope and love” (1 Cor 13:13). Love of course, is named as the greatest of these, and yet in Colossians Paul seems to indicate that hope underpins and allows the other two to become manifest. “We have heard about your faith in Christ and the love you have for all people, this comes from the hope you have of what is to come” (paraphrase). Hope allows our faith to be steadfast and true, and our love to be genuine and authentic towards others and for God. Faith and love spring up from the hope we have within us.

We're made to hope. It's what often keeps us moving forwards (you'll notice one symptom of hopelessness is passivity or feeling 'stuck'). There are a few different avenues for us to walk regarding our hope. We can defer hope; or we can misplace hope; or we can put our hope in God.

As you navigate your church communities and everyday life in your towns and villages, how are you finding the hope within you these days? And where are you taking that hope?

It is easy to lose hope, to defer it. This is especially true as churches manage decline, and denominations face an uncertain future. But, if Paul's words are to ring true, without hope we'll probably struggle in our love for those we seek to serve. You can't give away what you don't already possess – you can't offer God's promise of life and wisdom to your neighbours without already living with the reality of this better way. Scripture encourages us to always be ready with an answer for the hope we have (1 Peter) but like John Eldredge says, the problem is, no-one ever asks! Proverbs says many things about the heart (our inner landscape), but two stick out to me. Proverbs 4:23 says we must guard our heart as it is the well-spring of life; and 13:12 says that hope deferred makes the heart sick. If we lose hope, all life within is a pale comparison to the offer of fullness in Christ. But a desire fulfilled is a tree of life – a hope within us that is realised and comes into fruition, brings forth abundance and life, sustained by the true Vine.



Hope misplaced also puts us on rocky ground. We can put our hope in other things apart from God. Sometimes it's church, it's the structure or the new idea; maybe our hope for the future of our church can be found in the next programme or missional idea; or our hope could even be in a person, a new youth leader or minister to inject some passion and enthusiasm into the congregation. Hope is a truly precious treasure and the temptation these days is to look elsewhere to make something happen if we're not seeing God move in a way we'd like or expect.

But there are things always happening. God is always working. God is worthy of our hopeful expectation. God calls us to put our hope in Him. This hope that is placed in Him, will in turn become, according to Hebrews, the anchor for our soul. In fact, hope is called "a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has already entered..." (6:19-20).

So, if we have eyes to see, ears to hear and wise and discerning hearts then we stand a better chance of being able to see and discern the activity and movement of the Holy Spirit. We long and ache for restoration and we'll catch these glimpses of God's glory if our perceptions are expansive enough. If we've reduced the fruit of God's work to the institutional church then yes, I can imagine hopelessness will quickly move into the neighbourhood.

We must slow down enough to notice. We can't run at the pace of the world and maintain intimacy and union with God, and we definitely won't witness what we long to see. It will pass by in a blur like a tree next to the trainline!





So, what are people noticing from around the RM movement, where are they seeing God move?

In the Network News sections of this magazine you can read that our friends at Coastal Roots Community in Perranporth, Cornwall are seeing God move in areas around climate justice, as the community unites to tackle the issues they face. Missional Listener Joy Dimond is seeing God mostly through an array of connections in the local community, in all areas of life. The Oatridge family are mission enablers and seeing God move in the business community who gather

around their co-working space, where people are discovering a place of belonging, sharing and general 'one-anothering', as hearts and lives are being turned towards mission. Dorset Youth for Christ's School Life Pastor is seeing God move in the lives of the young people he mentors, and in the compassion in the teachers who work with the more challenging students, following Jesus' example to love without

discrimination. Sam and Suzie Abramian in Norfolk are seeing God through the challenges of the season of missional listening and discerning the way ahead, God is bringing people to them in the context of everyday life and work. They are trusting in His peace that transcends understanding. Eryl Parry is seeing God move in the mountains and valleys of North Wales, engaging with the outdoor community and welcoming a new season with Jill Ireland moving into the area for work and ministry.

This is just a very small snapshot of some Kingdom activity around the network. We invite you to keep the stories coming. Remember, the Master Storyteller is skilfully inviting you to join Him as He pens the next chapter. You have a crucial part to play in the story. Stories like these birth hope, inspire hope and sustain hope. And then hope subsequently, ensures the soil from which faith and love spring forth is healthy.

Our prayer is that hope will be the anchor for your soul, that it will reflect the heart's deep longing for a better age and for the renewal of all things. From there may this desire allow you to love with abandon and live with faith to move mountains.



**“Three things will remain,  
faith, hope and love”**  
(1 Cor 13:13).

### The Oatridge Family, Mission Enablers, North Lincolnshire

As Mission Enablers, we continue to pray in and for the villages and towns of North Lincolnshire both on our own and with others, as this seems to us to be the primary basis of our calling. We are listening to God and praying for Him to work in and through His people to see His Kingdom come. We meet monthly with a group of people who wish to reach others with the gospel, to pray for the county, hear one-another's stories and pray for each other.

We see God's Kingdom most closely as we work in the Business Community - we seek to run our weekly co-working event in a way that brings God's Kingdom values into people's lives and our workspace e.g. providing a place of belonging; a place of safety where people can share their deepest hurts and concerns; a place where people love one-another and look after one another.

We see God growing individuals in their discipleship and as God's Kingdom comes in their hearts they are turning their hearts and lives towards mission: Two ladies exploring what mission and church might look like for the community of people who play games in their chapel each month; an older couple, having moved into a retirement apartment, seeking to create community within the apartments and to share the love of Jesus and the gospel. Through coaching, Christian's are being enabled to discern what roles they should let go of, or pick up, to fulfil God's calling on their lives.

**Prayer:** We give thanks that we have a faithful God who is at work in the world and has invited us to be co-workers in His mission. We dream that God would fan into flame small sparks so that each community, village and town will have a vibrant expression of His body.

### Pinchbeck Baptist Church, Pinchbeck, Lincolnshire

PBC is actively involved with reaching out and being salt and light to our community whether it's out at the village carnival or within the walls of the building. Our weekly 'Tea Coffee Toast' continuing to grow in number and averaging about 35 per week with two thirds of folk not seen on a Sunday. Many are lonely or feel this offers a safe space to be themselves whilst receiving practical help and Christian support. We also have Books Bits and Bobs, mental and physical health support, and new people calling in to Sunday worship. We feel God is stirring the community and existing barriers are being broken down between the community and the perception of what Church is about.

Sunday service numbers have stabilised, but God is still bringing in people who have the skills needed for the work to be expanded. There is an increasing realisation that more prayer is key to Kingdom growth. We have been approached by a Parish Councillor to partner with the Community Hub on a Mental and Physical health awareness day which may lead to other activity and involvement to bring in more services and support for people in the village.

We would like to be able to provide a Spiritual Hub so people can see God's love in action and for that love to be mirrored back to the community towards mental, physical and spiritual wholeness as God intended.

Please pray for the whole church as we seek to follow and keep up with where God is leading and wisdom to know the right timings. We would also ask for prayer for physical health within the congregation. GOD IS GOOD! All the time!



## Sue Christie, Missional Listener, Nocton, Lincolnshire

Each week I open, and walk in to, a large, open, peaceful space. Whatever the weather – all is calm, all is bright (oops wrong season!). Within an hour or so, this space begins to come alive with the sound of some eager children as they arrive from different villages, and come in, pleased to be meeting and sharing together, to play and laugh together, craft together, play cards together, or simply chat or sit in an armchair looking out on to beautiful village or read a book. The choice is theirs.

Some need refreshment – so they help themselves (or others who need help) to a drink – and may be a cake too! Others, perhaps struggling with what life can throw at us, come in quietly and are gently welcomed in. Midmorning a beautiful

sound rings out, signalling it's prayer time, which happens in the corner of this same space, (and is open all day for anyone to go in to be quiet, still, pray, etc). Quite a few come, but not all...yet. It is a special time. Prayer cards with a phrase from a psalm are given out. One participant smiles as she tells us that sometimes she takes a few when she goes out and leaves them on a bus, or in a café, or on a bench... "you never know" she says! Returning to the main area, more have arrived and there is a gentle buzz of conversation, laughter, sometimes tears, all different, all with our 'stuff', but all together, sharing, listening, caring, helping. "This place is a lifesaver" has been said a number of times.....ooh that's a conversation starter .....Kingdom values.... Oh, I nearly forgot to say all of these 'children' are grown-ups at a Renew Wellbeing space in a village hall. Thank you Ruth for the vision, and thanks be to God whose children we always are.

## Wychwood Baptist Church and the Life Centre, Milton-Under-Wychwood, Oxfordshire

*Jesus said: 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.'* (John 10v10)

With summer behind us, we give thanks for opportunities to spend time with our community in our village fete, and the fun run that we organised. The latter was a huge undertaking, but was thoroughly enjoyed by all. Please pray that events such as these help us develop relationships that lead to gospel opportunities.

Pray too that our Summer holiday club will have reached many children who attended with the gospel.

As we head into the autumn, we look forward to taking some of our largely unchurched youth on an overnight trip with other churches. We are also hoping to have another Light Party as well as hosting an evangelistic 'Murder Mystery' evening.

As we share 'life' with our community, whether that is supporting practical needs through our 'Life Larder' foodbank provision, or our Cafe, our Youth & Children's work, or other Community events, and Sunday ministry – our desire is that they lead to opportunities to point them to Jesus.

Finally, please pray for our Church. To love and support each other in our different life challenges. That we would grow in our knowledge and love of the Lord Jesus, and reveal him to others.





# Faith in Later Life

Alexandra Drew



**The Bible is packed with examples of older people living purposefully for God, being respected in their communities, and sharing wisdom with future generations. Abraham was 99 when God promised to make him the father of many nations. Moses was 80 when he spoke to Pharaoh, and the prophet Anna at 84 was worshipping God with fasting and prayer in the temple day and night. Abraham, Moses, and Anna are just some of those who honoured God well into old age and are now held up as wonderful examples to us.**

Fast forward to 2024 and to the UK, and I'm afraid older age is often not associated with this vitality and purpose. All too often older people, rather than being at the heart of families, communities, and even the church, are pushed to the margins and seen as incompetent, hostile, and a burden to society.

But our population is getting older, that's a fact. Fewer babies are being born and more people are living longer, and those of us still in our younger years have a vested interest to help shift our negative culture around ageing. After all, if we're breathing we're ageing, and the church is wonderfully positioned and biblically motivated to be at the forefront of this shift.

Faith in Later Life began in 2017 in response to a growing need for local churches to receive support in their ministries among older people, to help them become more effective or to encourage them to keep going in this vital work among the fastest growing and much-loved sector of our population.

How engaged older people are in matters of faith, church life and discipleship will vary, and that's where Faith in Later Life comes in. Our work is in part to help churches keep and draw older people in the heart of their communities, enabling and mobilising them to minister meaningfully for the whole of their lives. Equipping the entire church to reach older people with God's love through the challenging times and the end of their lives, in a way that goes beyond pastoral care.

We also love seeing those in later life come to know Jesus. We understand the urgency of this, and the complexities



**...the church is wonderfully positioned and biblically motivated to be at the forefront of this shift.**



Alex is the CEO of Faith in Later Life and leads their ongoing work and development. She is passionate and experienced in inspiring and equipping people for the opportunities and challenges of later life, and in helping them know Jesus more deeply or for the first time. Alex has three grown up sons, and she lives in the West Country.



unpaid, who have a heart for older people and are already ministering among those in later life in some way.

Church Champions sign up to receive our information and training opportunities and this gives them access to a whole range of free support, training, prayer, and encouragement; like how we can minister to those with dementia, or how to share the gospel with older people at any stage. We have bimonthly online training and prayer sessions and lots of helpful information on our website.

wrought by a lifetime of misconceptions about the church, God, and His people, and for some, diminishing cognitive clarity or ability.

We know church champions are busy people and so they choose to what extent they engage with us and our resources.

There are physical challenges to ministering among those in later life too. For many older people there is a season when they're not out and about so much anymore, they're behind closed doors, perhaps because of illness, or because they're near the end of their lives, and it's harder for us to reach them.

Feedback we receive shows that those ministering among older people greatly value our resources, recognition of their work, prayer, and fellowship, and many have expanded their ministry, or reignited when they ran out of ideas and encouragement.

The challenges of reaching older people living in a rural context are often magnified by geographical isolation, limited transport, accessibility issues, technological barriers, and the limited resources of smaller congregations.

We also speak into the media through Christian and secular channels to spotlight key issues such as ageism, loneliness, and the value of older people in society.

We want to support churches with these challenges and more, and together join in with God's mission to make disciples.

Whatever your ministry among older people looks like; we're praying for you, and we invite you to come and be part of our growing network as together we help people everywhere to have faith in later life.

We do this primarily through our network of almost 1,000 Church Champions. These are people in churches around the UK, paid or

**Find out more:**  
<https://faithinlaterlife.org>



# Advent Book Review

## Do not be afraid

by Rachel Mann

Reviewed by Simon Mattholie



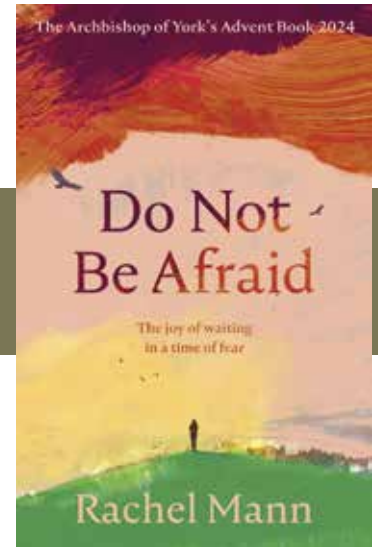
At Advent, we actively anticipate and pray for Christ's return, and we wait with hope to meet him again at Christmas. We live in a time when fear and anxiety threaten to overwhelm us. The after-effects of the pandemic have left many exhausted. Waiting is one of the richest spiritual seams in the Bible and Christian tradition and is always tied to hope. Our present, impatient age is obsessed with instant gratification offered through social media and our seeming addiction to speed of action and quickness of thought. If we can discover ways to utilise this time creatively for the Lord and discover hope in the joyful news that Jesus Christ has brought, there is wonder and beauty in waiting. And what better time to focus on this good news than Advent, the great season of watching and waiting, says The Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell.

Do not be afraid: *The Joy of Waiting in a Time of Fear* is his Advent book for 2024. Written by Rachel Mann, a priest, poet, theologian, and author, who has also written fifteen books, including *Fierce Imaginings*, which was shortlisted for the Michael Ramsey Prize. Rachel regularly contributes to BBC's 'Thought for the Day' and currently serves as the Archdeacon of Salford and Bolton in the Diocese of Manchester. Given all these roles, it

would be easy to assume that Rachel would write about busyness and time management. However, her thoughtful journey through the season of Advent beautifully reflects on stories of God waiting with us when we are worried, fearful, or disconcerted by the times.

Spanning the four weeks of Advent, Rachel shares a thought each day with honesty and occasional humour, alongside a prayer and two or three questions. The book is an invitation to sense the richness and promise of God amid these everyday experiences. I would challenge anyone to read without the soul-searching words touching something far deeper in their spirit.

Learning to find hope along with meaning in the waiting is, in my opinion, a crucial part of the Advent season. Rachel's book perhaps most significantly reminds us that Jesus Christ enters the world as the long-awaited one, the servant who waits on others, and the one on whom we are adoringly asked to wait. I recommend ordering a copy through SPCK and discovering for yourself the joy of waiting in a time of fear.



# Advent Book Review

## Mary's Voice

by Amy Orr-Ewing  
Reviewed by Jo Allen



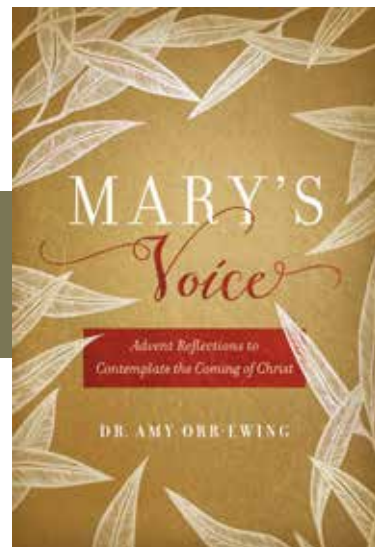
This advent I suggest you pick up Amy Orr-Ewing's book 'Mary's voice'. This book looks at advent through the eyes of Mary, opening up the Christmas story from a faithful female perspective. Each daily reflection has a scripture reading, a thought, a prayer and a painting.

This book highlights her marginality and the powers at play in her culture, alongside her trusting faith. What stood out was the gospel of Luke's reliance on Mary's voice as a key witness to the birth of Jesus. We may find this obvious, but when we think about it, we will preach saying "Luke wrote" or "God says", with little recognition of Luke's sources. Luke has been able to tell the story including Mary's voice, a bold move in a patriarchal society. Reflecting on her position in society and how amazing it was of God to choose and unmarried woman to bear his son, challenged me and changed me last advent.

I didn't enjoy every painting but that's because I appreciate more modern art, however I was able to take a moment to reflect on the life of Mary and Jesus as I soaked in each piece daily. My favourite was a painting of Mary's face by Charlie

Mackesy because, in contrast to the many more well-known paintings found in this book, it depicts her as a simple young woman. It's incredible to be reminded that Mary was just an ordinary woman, going about her life, interrupted by God's plans. It's significant not only because of her position as a betrothed woman in society, but because she was like you and me, and God still chose her, I love that about God.

Ironically, this is not just a book about Mary, it's really a book about the coming of Jesus through the eyes of the woman who experienced it all first hand. Wonderfully Amy writes "The central woman to the Christian faith has a voice and she points us towards the Lord Jesus. Encouraging us to dwell on who he is and what he came to do in this world." (p. xvi) This book came out in 2023, and if you haven't read it then I'd recommend grabbing a copy this advent.



# Advent **Book Review**

## Darkling

by Gideon Heugh  
Reviewed by Jon Timms



This book serves as an encouragement to enter the Advent season with intentionality, cultivating a time of reflection, recognition and anticipation. While Christmas itself is a twelve-day feast and celebration, Advent is our invitation to “reflect, slow our pace and to hunker down while the cold winds blow.”

The world in which we inhabit is going through unprecedented times. We’ve recently lived through a global pandemic, from which we’re still navigating the fall out; we live the “existential threat of climate change and the mass theft of our attention by the tech companies.” There is “a growing tide of loneliness, depression and anxiety... and a polarised realm of political and social discourse.”

These are the Darkling days. The church can sometimes be guilty of rushing through a dark or hard season, shunning difficult or negative things that are often feared or seen with terror and despair. Heugh points towards life in all its fullness and an appropriate time for every season, inviting the reader to “cultivate the spirit of autumn and winter within us. We need to learn to live with the dark, not to try and blast it away with neon lights and toxic positivity.”

This book is a series of reflections that consider our hopes as well as our fears. In the process, we acknowledge the darkness as simply how things are sometimes, or at least have been in the past or in certain seasons of our lives.

Gideon Heugh is a poet, liturgist and environmentalist who leads the reader through the Advent season with 25 reflections, made up of prayers, poems, prompts, blessings and devotions. Heugh is a wonderful and insightful companion to the Advent season and I would strongly encourage this short read as a welcome addition to your Advent rhythms and practices. The job of poets, prophets and pioneers is to guide inquisitive pilgrims off the tried and tested path, to head off-trail and into new territory. Heugh does with masterfully, with genuine humility and gentleness. His words are kind to the sensitivities of the human condition, while at the same time offer retreat into the safety, flow and grace found in the arms of God.

## Darkling

Gideon Heugh



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