

CHRIST CHURCH

Life

living to
love God
and you

December/January 2021/22



'The Word became a human being and, full of grace and truth, living among us. We saw his glory, the glory which he received as the Father's only Son.'

~ John 1:14 GNB





Contents Page

Vicar's Letter	3
Alan Cottenden's on The Frontline	9
Women in the Shadows	14
The Heart of Christmas	16
The love of music- Friends for life	18
Street Angels	19
How are you Celebrating Christmas?	22
This Sunrise of Wonder- Book Review	24
Pastors Training in Soweto	26
Culture Shock	28
Children's Christmas activities at Christ Church	30
Christmas Services	31

Thank you to all who have contributed articles for this edition of Life magazine.

*Please note that the **deadline** for submissions for the **February/March edition** will be **14th January 2022**.*

*Submissions are emailed to: **editor@ccbedford.org***

Vicar's Letter

Dear friends,

7th June 2000 – a date Sarah and I have not forgotten. The day we arrived in Bedford. It had been a slightly tortuous process. Sarah and I had always thought Christ Church was our next step the moment that David Harris left in October 1999.



The Bishop and Archdeacon thought so too. Bizarrely, I was not shortlisted. We were very deflated, but then the interviews appointed no-one, and my name was pressed forward by Bishop Christopher. I think the wardens feared I was some Bishop's stooge, there to change the church from its evangelical heritage. No, I was no such flunky!

You can't beat living here

Our home truly has been our home. Emily was 14 months old when we arrived. It's been wonderful for her to grow up in such a great church, community and schools. She still has good friends in Bedford. The vicarage was very tired when we first saw it. Embarrassingly, it's rather tired again after 21 years. Our home has been a delight, our garden a joy, and we really do like living so close to the church. Nothing beats 'working from home' with a 25 second commute to the office!



Church Barbecue 2002

Using our garden, once we had hacked it back and re-modelled it quite a bit, has been our gift to you: the events, the parties, the activities which it hosted, have shown what joy it can bring. The tired vicarage showed us how generous and loving you are. Some £6,000 was raised to decorate, install a new kitchen and build a patio. You were so kind to welcome us with such generosity, and that generous nature continues to permeate Christ Church to this day.

Generous God and his generous people

Your generosity and kindness, how you welcomed us into your lives and homes, speaks volumes of your faithful discipleship. That love was most shown, as you will so know, by the support and prayers for Sarah, Emily and I through my bowel cancer. When we leave, it will be just short of 13 years since that worrying diagnosis. An aggressive cancer tumour was met with a wave of prayer and love. All of us are party to God's gift of my healing, all of us can tell that our God is still active today, in healing, in wonders and in signs of his presence amongst us. My cancer journey was hugely important in my own walk with Christ. It focussed me on what is important. It awakened me to allow the Holy Spirit to fashion my life more and more, to know the depths of God's undeserved grace, while I live knowing that I have been healed when so many others have not.

Bumpy roads abound

My Training Incumbent was convinced I was the right person for Christ Church – he was one among a number, not least Bishop John who licensed me here. Christ Church had a conviction about itself and its theology, determined to be a 'sound church'. That was really good. I loved the confidence in the Gospel and the love for opening the Scriptures. I hope I have been a worthy servant of that great heritage.

Bishop John felt the church lacked warmth and grace, love and a sense of being God's family. In the first few years, we felt pulled in different directions. There was much hurt amongst us and little sign of moving on. A key moment was a PCC when truth was spoken by a wonderful Christian (sadly, he left not long afterwards) that we needed to repent of our past actions. I remember leading the PCC to kneel around the sanctuary rail and together we said sorry for the hurts we had given and the resentments we had held. The following Sunday I invited the PCC to kneel in the same place in front of the congregation and the congregation to join us in saying sorry. Repentance is not easy. Repentance is about turning from one direction to another. Repentance is humility in action.

That whole episode was a key moment: much was left behind and Christ Church began its journey of being both faithful to the Gospel and a vehicle of God's love among us and to our community.





Picnic in the Paddock 2005



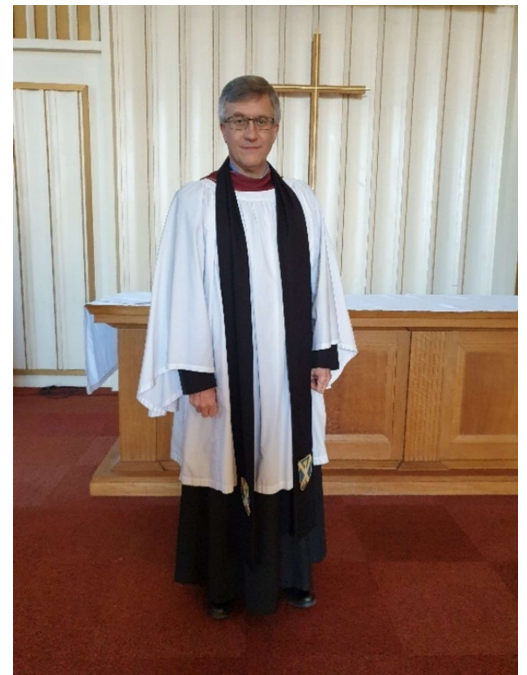
Talent Show 2019

Out of such, we carved our Mission Statement: "To enable everyone to be maturing followers of Christ, who experience and live out God's love in every part of their lives" and our strapline: "Living to love God and you." Together we have built a church that has not left its evangelical mooring. It has held fast to an orthodox Gospel and sought to fulfil Jesus' commands to love God, to love our neighbour, and to love one another.

Loving the step forward

I think those foundations transformed us. Over time, I have encouraged you to step forward, to seek some way of serving God's great purposes at Christ Church and beyond, and to welcome one another with love. You have stepped forward time and again – I know that sometimes you laughed that I was a little too persuasive, but perhaps, I like to think, it was less me and more the Holy Spirit nudging.

I have been privileged with wonderful church wardens. They have been so important to all my ministry at Christ Church. Their wisdom, their servant-heartedness have blessed me time and again. Take time to look at their names in the church porch and give thanks to God for these servant-hearted men and women.



I also give thanks for the curates I have known, served and formed. You welcomed them warmly and worked with them as they established their ministry. You have helped shape them and prepare them for their ministry. Each is still a friend. Each remembers the love you showed and the care you took in their development.



Holiday at Home 2014

Welcoming is a great aspect of Christ Church. I think all of us are aware of how we were welcomed and invited to step forward into church life, church friendships and church activities. Having fun is another great aspect of Christ Church. I recall the social events, parties, activities, Church Weekends Away (and especially the talent shows – do you remember the staff dance routine or pelting them with shaving foam?) and community events. I'm a firm believer that Christian should be people of joy. We should enjoy each other's company, laugh and learn together.

I miss those who have left us, especially those taken from us through death, even more so those untimely deaths. We have weathered great loss at times. I still regret those who felt they wished to step away from our church family. It could be about the direction of the church – too far or not far enough – and yet I feel the burden that sometimes it was me, something I said, something I didn't do. I wish it was the other person at fault, but I suspect I was the one wrong. I am sorry to all whom I've offended. I apologise. As I move on, you may feel able to re-engage with your beloved Christ Church.



Landlubbers 2004



The Four Incumbents

Celebrating the good

There was 2002 when we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the placing of Christ Church's tin tabernacle on this site. What joy we had in a partying together, giving thanks and welcoming back past incumbents: John Tiller, Don Humphries and David Harris.

There was 2005 when we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the creation of Christ Church as a parish church for the Castle Road and Devon Park estate, carved out of the old St Cuthbert's.

There was 2008 when we gave thanks on the 50th anniversary of our present church building, consecrated on 29th September 1958.



Reopening of the Church Halls 2018

There was 2018 when we celebrated the opening of our new halls with Bishop Alan as some 800 from our local community entered the new rooms and halls. I am still in awe that you raised £2.5 million. When I knew I had to grasp this nettle, to redevelop our halls and fit them for the 21st century, I really wanted to move away, to avoid the challenge and the leadership. God had other ideas. Thank you to you for putting your confidence in my vision to transform what we can offer our community. Thank you for your endless generosity. I found it so tough to return year after year asking for more, and yet you rose to that challenge. We stand in awe of what God achieved through us.

There are other things, less tangible, to celebrate. I have no idea how many of you have come to faith over the last 21 years, but it's a fair number. It's good not to count such things, as the Bible reminds: counting encourages pride. I am delighted how we have changed. Bishop John told me that Christ Church had more PhDs than any other congregation in the Diocese. Perhaps that was true in 2000. It was also predominately of one ethnicity, managerial and professional. Not anymore, to God be the glory! We are a rich mix socially, economically, ethnically. You reflect our community better than ever, and we are a foretaste of the heavenly crowd standing before the throne of God our Father.

Distractions or opportunities

I have always been politically aware in regard to the Church of England. I love my Church. I grieve over the uncertain trumpet it offers. I delight in the privilege I have of being the minister and priest for all the people, of faith and no faith, who live in the parish and community. There are opportunities to be involved in local life that alone come to the parish priest. To serve the Castle Road and Devon Park Estate, the people, the shops, the school has been an honour. Being salt and light is our role in all our places of work and community.

From 2005, I was a member of General Synod, the Church of England's 'parliament' for 10 years, honoured to have been so elected by my clergy peers. In 2010, I was asked to be Rural Dean, overseeing and leading the mission of the 22 parishes of the Deanery. Both these roles offered space to influence at the highest levels nationally and the broadest widths locally. I loved both roles and, in some ways, miss their opportunities.

Handing on

People have asked if I have a say in my successor. No, I don't, but God does, and that's far more important. I would want to emphasise the breadth of the church membership and your commitment to an orthodox evangelical Anglicanism. I would point out the value of the sense of family, but you're a family with porous walls: you welcome the newcomer and stranger.

Your love of Christ extends in love to those seeking you and seeking a new spiritual home. I would want to hope for a younger person, whose energy and passion continue to inspire you in your faith and in your mission to make Christ known.



Christ Church is not the church I came to in 2000. That's good news! It means we have grown and developed. We have met this generation and walked with them. We have held the good of the past and placed the rest behind us. I pray you to care for the seniors, to encourage the families and to come alongside the next generation. There is an impressive next story to be written in the pages of Christ Church – it's your church and your family. I promise to pray for you and watch with joy the unfolding story of the next chapter. With love and thanks for your friendship in Christ,



Christingle 2019



70s Dance Night 2002

Alan Cottenden's On The Frontline



I have a question for you: how do you “do” Christmas? How do you embrace the festivities without getting sucked into expensive excesses? How do you enjoy familiar carols, Christmas gatherings, traditional food and exchanging gifts, without losing sight of Jesus, the “reason for the season”?

As a former store manager at Debenhams, Laura Turpie has thought about these things more than most, so I thought I’d ask her to share her insights with us.

Thanks for agreeing to share, Laura. Tell us about your time at Debenhams

Well, for 14 years – until we had the children – I used to work in retail and latterly managed Debenhams stores. Since the Christmas season typically accounted for three-quarters of our annual sales, Christmas was a big deal for us commercially and organisationally. I would start preparing in May when I had to place orders for our Christmas stock and plan the logistics for the Christmas period then, as summer came to an end, I would set about recruiting the 30% or so extra staff we would need. That might take our headcount to 300, say, so you can imagine the complexities of the staff rotas! As Christmas approached, the store would get busier and busier until, finally, we closed at 19:30 on Christmas Eve, having dismantled all the Christmas displays and got things ready for the Boxing Day sales! My last – and very pleasant – task was to wish all the staff a happy Christmas as they left.

Sounds like many people’s worst nightmare! Did you enjoy it?

I loved it! Demanding, stressful and challenging, but a real joy. A privilege.

A privilege?

Yes. It's such a privilege that Christmas – a festival founded on celebrating the birth of our Lord – has such a wide impact across society as a whole. Many of those who don't know Jesus nevertheless respond to Christmas by enjoying time together with family and friends and exchanging gifts. In the store, I would have many, many opportunities to help customers select gifts for their special people. What a privilege to be invited to help people with something so important to them. The Christmas season would somehow prompt staff members to open up to one another more than usual, sharing their hopes, dreams and challenges. I would always have opportunities to share my faith. For example, I might be asked – by customers or staff members - what I planned to do at Christmas, and that would give me the opportunity to talk very naturally about my immediate family but also my church family and how important Christmas celebrations with them were to me because of the goodness of God in sending Jesus. Or I might ask what Christmas meant to them. Either way, my approach was to listen and share rather than climb on a soapbox and “preach”.

Christians sometimes grumble about what they see as the over-commercialisation of Christmas: did you find it difficult to avoid being caught up in all of that?

Not really, although I can certainly see the danger and understand the question. The bible tells us that we are to live in the world without being of the world, without taking on its values. We are not meant to withdraw from the world but rather to live by God's values in it. That's certainly how I saw my role. For example, when serving a customer, I never saw it as my goal to extract from them as much money as I could; rather, I aimed to help them to select the gift that best “ticked their boxes”, within their declared budget. Of course, the store had to make a profit but that didn't have to be at odds with serving customers well and making the store a great place to work. Giving gifts is a very natural response to celebrating a birthday and a fun thing to do.

How did you relate Christmas at Debenhams to Christmas at home? Preparations must have unfolded to very different timetables...

Yes, I might – for example – find myself planning summer holidays at home at the same time as I was ordering Christmas stock at work! One of the key events for me was always *Midnight Mass* on Christmas Eve: that was when Christmas at Debenhams was done, and I could give my full attention to Christmas at home. When I first worked at Debenhams I was living at home with my parents and we had a great tradition of gathering with family and friends on Christmas Eve. Honey-roast ham and new potatoes were on the menu, laughter was in the air and then we would all transfer to church for *Midnight Mass*. Magical!

Once I'd finished at Debenhams it took me quite a while to get out of the habit of planning for Christmas so far in advance: it was great to be able to take a more relaxed approach but it took some getting used to. One night in the first August after I left, I woke up in a cold sweat panicking because I hadn't yet planned what to do with the Christmas crackers that would soon be arriving into store but that no customer would want to see yet!

How do you do Christmas these days?

Andrew and I have two children: Matthew is 8 and Natasha is 6. They are increasingly involved in Christmas preparations and we're building our own family traditions. They are too young for the late Christmas Eve service yet but I can certainly see us embracing that as a family when they are older. We will have some members of our extended family joining us over Christmas, including grandparents. We won't come to church Christmas morning this year so that we can spend time with family members who can only be with us in the morning. There will be muffins for breakfast – already a Christmas family tradition – after which we'll open our presents. Lovely!

In the run up to Christmas we'll join in putting together a "Christmas shoebox" to give to a child through the *Christmas child appeal*, and buying a toy for the *Women's Refuge* in Bedford. We'll also be encouraging the children to sort through their toys to see if there are any they'd like to sell, or give away for other children to enjoy. All are practical ways for us to spread the joy of Christmas beyond ourselves.

Many people find Christmas a stressful time: where does the stress come from?

It's very easy to lay heavy expectations on ourselves, imagining that we'll have failed if everything isn't perfect. Everyone must be delighted with the presents we've bought; the food must all be ready on time; and everything should be great fun with no lost tempers or grumpy words! With a target of perfection like that, we're setting ourselves up for failure! Peer pressure can also affect us more than we care to admit. Who wants to feel that they might be spending less time, money or effort on their preparations than the rest of the family or the families of their kids' school friends? The media can be unhelpful, too. The newspapers have been warning us for weeks that – horror of horrors! – there will be a shortage of toys in the shops this Christmas, due to COVID!

Do you have any good tips to share?

Here are some ideas to consider:

- Try to be gently realistic with yourself about your Christmas plans. Avoid setting yourself the impossible task of achieving perfection! It's all about spending time together.
- Give some thought to the dangers of excess. Consider how much you want to spend on gifts and plan accordingly. Beware buying way more food than you'll need, with the risk of waste.
- Consider buying presents from eBay (www.ebay.co.uk) or finding one for free on Freecycle (www.freecycle.org). Lots of items – particularly children's toys – are available as used items in very good condition, either free or for a fraction of the cost of new. One year we got a superb *Brio* model railway set for Matthew on eBay.
- Equally, why not invite your children to sort through their toys and select some they have finished with that they could sell or give away online for other children to enjoy. Parents with tight budgets will be especially appreciative if you can do it in the run up to Christmas. And what a great way to encourage your own children to be thoughtful and generous.
- At Christmas, lots of organisations run schemes for those with few resources at their disposal. Why not join in as a family? It's another great way to encourage your children to broaden their horizons beyond their own Christmases. For example, *Operation Christmas Child* runs a Christmas shoebox scheme (collected by local schools and some local businesses) and *Foodbank* is particularly appreciative of donations at Christmas (collection point in the Christ Church hub).

Thank you!

Alan Cottenden



Give as you Live®
Online

HAVE A MAGICAL CHRISTMAS

Turn your ordinary gift shopping into something extraordinary for us

Generate free donations on online purchases at 5,500+ retailers

www.giveasyoulive.com/join/ccbedford

Simply visit the above link to get started



Women in the Shadows

Amongst the jugglers and the worship band a group of people could be seen gathering on autumnal evenings at Christ Church. Our preoccupation, to undertake the Clewer Initiative's ['Women in the Shadows'](#) course. Our task, to begin to comprehend the vastness and graveness of modern-day slavery in the UK, in particular its impact on women and to learn what we could do in response.

Bedford's Anti-Slavery Group, one of Christ Church's groups, facilitated the course, with Jude Hamilton anchoring sessions each week. The scope of the course was broad, looking at sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, county lines and victim recovery - however, pinpointing each time what this looked like for women.

Expertly crafted videos portrayed vivid experiences of women who had been enslaved. Each revealing something of the deep sense of isolation, fear, entrapment, betrayal and hopelessness of women who had been truly left in the shadows.

One film haunts me still - a young woman from Albania who was renamed Anita, who fell in love with a man her family disapproved of and ran away to Rome with him in search of a new life...an adventure. Only to be sold by her boyfriend to a man for 3,000 euros. He forced her into the sex industry and moved her to the UK where she lived in cramped conditions, until eventually the police raided the house she was in and she was rescued. In Anita's words *"I'd heard stories of sex slaves, but I never thought it would happen to me."*

The course tapped into deep emotions, as we grappled with the fact that there are women and children being bought and used for criminal activity, in our streets and our towns. In 2019 there was estimated to be 136,000 women, men and children trapped in slavery in the UK. Feelings of concern, anger, injustice, disbelief (in this society, today?), anger and compassion emerged as we were brought face to face with these hard truths.

We were encouraged throughout the course to take small steps in response to the Goliath of modern-day slavery:

“The only way that slavery is going to end is if society as a whole gets together to do their bit... we all have a role to play.”

~ Louise Hulland, campaigner and journalist ~

One participant's response was to check out the Modern-Day Slavery statement of a favourite online shop and to write to the CEO with queries. Another's was to email the safeguarding lead in her workplace who will deliver bespoke training on how to respond to victims. And mine was to download some apps and share them with colleagues and to ensure I have my ears and eyes open as I go about my daily life in and around Bedford – looking out for signs of modern-day slavery.

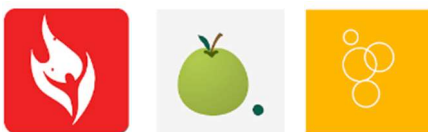
If you're interested in finding out more, would like to join the Christ Church Anti-Slavery group or would like us to do a short awareness raising session over Zoom, please email antislavery.bedford@gmail.com

Please also find us on Facebook here:

<https://www.facebook.com/breakingchainsinbedford>

And, why don't you take a step today? Downloading these apps is a great way to start...

- The Unseen App: [Download The App - Unseen \(unseenuk.org\)](https://unseenuk.org)
- The Farm Work Welfare App: theclewerinitiative.org/campaigns/the-farm-work-welfare-app
- Safe Car Wash App: theclewerinitiative.org/campaigns/safe-car-wash



**Helen Chignell from Kings Arms in conjunction with
Jude Hamilton and Will Eves from Christ Church**



The Heart of Christmas

Why we try to reverse Christmas

Last year, many of us experienced a Christmas when many of the ways we traditionally mark the season were suddenly denied to us.

This year, of course, we hope and pray that many of the experiences that help Christmas come alive return to our homes, our churches and communities. But whatever else December brings, it will offer us an opportunity to enter more deeply into the joyful mystery that lies at its heart: God becoming human in the birth of Jesus Christ.

And this humanity is the primary focus of John's gospel - as the Message translation puts it, "*the Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood.*" John 1:14.

Jesus' humanity can help us stay grounded when we feel the temptation to reverse what is at the heart of Christmas. Faced with the carols and cribs, tinsel and turkey, we can decry all that 'sentimentality' and suggest we look away from this world to the God of heaven and his master plan. The temptation is to reverse John 1:14 so instead of [the Word becoming flesh](#), we talk as if [the flesh becomes the Word](#). We so focus on the spiritual meaning, as we see it, of Christmas, that we lose what is at the centre of it all - Jesus the human being. Jesus the vulnerable, Jesus the outcast was born into a horrible world –

*Whilst Herod rages still from his dark tower
Christ clings to Mary, fingers tightly curled,
The lambs are slaughtered by the men of power,
And death squads spread their curse across the world.*¹

Fear, dislocation, helplessness – emotions, so many feel in today's world where those in power still act with impunity and helping those in need has become a political football rather than a moral requirement. Jesus did not just survive in a world like our own, he navigated a way through. In the sweat and tension of ordinary life under Roman rule, Jesus lived in a way that helped people to see that meaning and hope could make sense again.

Jesus had good times with all sorts of people and enjoyed his friends. I think he might have enjoyed the fun we have at Christmas too - because celebrating together is part of the way God made us! Christmas is a time of joy, not because, for a few days, we ignore all the hurt around us; but because peace can accompany anxiety, wholeness can come alongside suffering.

Christmas means holiday, getting together, food and drink. Something magical, a change of pace, scope for something a bit different. The sweet baby, the miraculous Jesus and the God in heaven don't fit the contemporary Christmas but a flesh and blood, party loving, outrageously generous friend might be welcome. And that down-to-earth friend is the real Jesus - the human Jesus - the one who came to show us what God is really like.

So, let's not try to get too spiritual this Christmas. Our ordinary celebrations can point to Jesus who navigated a joyful way through his messy world to bring us genuine peace and hope.

¹ Excerpt from poem "Refugee" by Malcolm Guite

- Michael Bishop



The love of music!

"Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination and life to everything." — Plato



In April 2021, Lucy, a violinist in the BBC Concert Orchestra, began befriending Andrew. Andrew has mild learning difficulties and has been blind since birth. Prior to his befriending visits from Lucy, Andrew received no visitors.

Lucy visits Andrew every week. Lucy says "Andrew loves music so we talk about music a lot. I take him CDs of the music he likes and pop quiz books, which we enjoy doing together. He astounds me with his knowledge of music!"

Recently, Lucy has started taking Andrew out for small trips outside of his care home, for example for coffee, which gives Andrew the opportunity to spend time in another environment and hear different sounds.

The manager of Andrew's care home says Andrew really enjoys Lucy's visits, which brings Lucy great joy to hear. Lucy says "I feel we are building a relationship which hopefully makes a difference to Andrew's life."

It costs us £40,000 a year to run the befriending service we offer to older people in care homes who are at risk of loneliness.

Because of supporters like you, our service has been here during 2021 to continue matching residents to befrienders with similar interest so they can share their passion with someone who understands. **Thank you!**



Friends for Life
— Bedford —

www.friendsforlifebedford.org.uk

Street Angels



Most of us have a Bible story that has stayed with us for one reason or another. For me, years in Sunday school and attending Broadstairs beach missions on holidays ensured that more than one stuck in my brain and affected my thinking.

One of these was the Good Samaritan. Jesus is explaining to a cynical, perhaps narrow-minded audience who their neighbours are that he instructs them to love. And the message loud and clear is that it is the person you would least likely consider. I always thought "how lovely"..... but did I do it? No.

I vaguely knew about Street Angels - my wonderful cousin Helen was a street pastor in Lincoln. I had her on a pedestal- what an amazing thing - for someone else to do! Not me!

Then about 3 years ago a Bedford Street Angel was standing at the front of church, telling our congregation about what they were doing here - in my home town- where my teenagers were going out. Martin Denny was sharing that Fran and Fred who were instrumental in launching Bedford Street Angels, had lost their own son when he was on a night out in the town. A victim of drunken aggression. A life snatched without provocation of any kind. They felt called by Jesus to do what they could to make Bedford a safer place in any way they could.

Martin could have been talking to just me - looking at just me. I felt hot, bothered and my heart was racing.

Love your neighbour.....

Jesus was telling me loud and clear - you can do this! Do it for me and in my name.

I spoke to Martin afterwards and put my name down for an observer shift. That didn't commit me after all, just showed willing!

My first shift, which started at 10pm on a Saturday night and ended about 4.30am on Sunday morning, was anything but an observer shift - through my own choice. You might say I got stuck right in!

In that first night I found a way of serving God that was incredibly meaningful to me, a way of sharing that practical love that Jesus talked about (that Good Samaritan) with complete strangers and sometimes being invited by those strangers to explain why I would voluntarily give up a night in a warm bed to patrol the streets of Bedford, wearing a back pack full of water bottles, flip flops, first aid stuff and a variety of other useful things.

We patrol in threes, with at least one female and one male. We are routinely faced with scared girls, separated from friends, not sure how to get home; a whole variety of folk who have had too much to drink and need help to sober up, clean up and catch a cab safely home. People who have had their drinks spiked, confused, disorientated and very scared. Youngsters thrown out of a club for a variety of reasons, and their friends don't know or don't care. Folk who just need a listening ear - alcohol has a way of loosening our tongues and reducing inhibition. People who have no charge on their phones to call for help or find their friends - we carry portable chargers.

We are met with hugs and high fives from folk who have been helped in the past and want to say thank you. They know we are Christians. We have the chance to share and witness - sowing seeds. God's love in action, not only meaningful to us but to them too!

We sweep up broken glass and pick up glass bottles abandoned on the pavement and road - unpleasant litter at the beginning of the evening - potential weapons at worst and something for barefooted ladies who have abandoned killer heels to cut their feet badly on in the small hours. We dish out free flip-flops to the ladies we spot barefoot. Those who know we have them seek us out and ask! They are always so grateful.

I have been vomited on, sworn at, cried on and hugged. I have been thanked, not just by the folk in trouble but by worried parents who we have had to contact to rescue their adult children. I have experienced kindness by a Bedford cab driver who drove me and a vulnerable young lady back to her home, came back for me and dropped me into town without charge. We work with and witness to door staff, police, ambulance crew just by our presence, without saying a word. We get a hot drink for free in Cashino's in quiet moments - we chat to the staff and sometimes the people gambling their money in the hope of a bit of luck. More "God" conversations.....

So, there you are. Do I look forward to staying up all night? No. Am I grumpy the next day for lack of sleep? Yes! Would I stop doing it? Absolutely not! I was called - and for a change I obeyed! And it is all in Jesus' name. I am no Good Samaritan but I am so, so honoured to be a part of Bedford Street Angels and serve God in this way.

-Claire Broughton-Welsh



How are you celebrating Christmas?

"Chestnuts roasting on an open fire..." well, no, that has never really been "Christmas for me"! But we all have traditions and habits which help to make the end of December feel like a special time of year, and growing up I was very attached to stockings, bacon rolls, carol services by candlelight, frost (usually in the absence of snow!) and so on.

When we moved to Benin, it was hard to know how to celebrate Christmas in such a different setting. The temperature was around 35°C so certainly no frost, bacon was nowhere to be found, and our Monkolé church didn't sing carols. The rest of the year round I was proud to say that they wrote their own Monkolé hymns and didn't use many translated ones, but at Christmas I missed the shepherds watching their flocks near the little town of Bethlehem upon a midnight clear!

In our home we still stuck up a (necessarily artificial) Christmas tree and decorated our living room with tinsel and homemade decorations. Our kids had stockings, and family and our CCB home group were very generous with their Christmas parcels.

I remember one Christmas morning feeling rather forlorn at church. The preacher hadn't even preached on a Christmas passage, and the choir weren't singing particularly Christmassy songs. I felt far from the things which made Christmas for me.

Fortunately, I then began to listen to the words of the song which the choir were singing in Monkolé. They were repeating over and over again, "Í gbe Jesu nju akã" which means, "All that's left is Jesus, Him alone", and I took that to be God's message to me. I needed to accept that "feeling Christmassy" was not the objective of the Christmas celebration. Traditions and habits can point us to Jesus, but their familiarity can also lull us into forgetting Who and what we are celebrating.

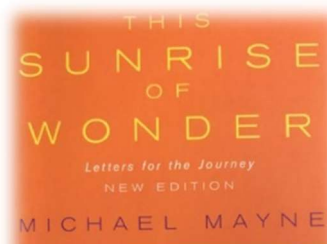
I was reminded of that lesson last year, when we realised that Christmas was once again going to be very different from anything we were used to. We couldn't get to England, and we couldn't even see the French grandparents because of Covid. We did manage to be with some of the cousins on Christmas Eve, but our church here didn't have a service on Christmas Day, so we livestreamed the CCB one instead!

I'm not even sure I can be completely confident in answering the question of how we will be celebrating Christmas this year. We have booked a Channel Tunnel crossing in the hope that we will get to my mum's for Christmas, but these days it is dangerous to try to predict the future!

However, I do know Who I will be celebrating on Christmas Day, and I know that He will be with us wherever we are and whatever we are doing. Jesus alone is the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, and our Lord.

-Hilary Deneufchâtel





This Sunrise of Wonder

- Book Review

Michael Mayne wrote this book in 1995 as a series of letters written to his Grandchildren, as a way of passing on his wisdom but also for them to know him in a more intimate way.

I started reading this 6 months ago. It has been one of those books that you have to slowly ponder and re-read. I didn't agree with everything he has written but yet there was so much that I could relate to. The topics in this book range from light and colour, poetry and music, prayer, spontaneity, 'inscape', wonder, living the Eucharist and the 'holy in the common', with so much more.

The section that jumped out at me most was this. *'I can come to understand that there is no object (and certainly no person) not worthy of wonder, and that what makes them so is that in each of its or his or her essence is a) unique b) unlikely (are giraffes and flamingos likely? Is a hummingbird? Or Mozart?) c)'Other'; and d) not mastered, that is to say, not capable of being fully understood, docketed and explained. Again, it is the child's approach to the world that we lose, not because we have resolved it's mystery but because we have grown accustomed to its face.'*

I have read and re-read these sentences a few times and they made my heart ache. The fact that from a relatively young age most people lose their childlike sense of wonder, awe and magical curiosity. The ability to ask questions even if you never find the answers. To intentionally stop to look, think, feel, see, smell and hear, to find stillness and to just be. To unashamedly be colour in a monochrome world, or perhaps I should say society, for we live in a beyond recognizably colourful world. Even in the midst of grief and sorrow, through suffering and pain, there, before our eyes, is so much to be found. Yet we don't see it. Perhaps we need to *'see beyond the familiar; see that things are not 'exactly as they are'*, Perhaps our lives are the biggest illusions of all?

It was my grandad who gave me this book to read, so I thought I would include some of his thoughts.

'If I could have given you just one gift it would not have been beauty, or riches, or a long life, it would have been the gift of wonder'. 'I wish I had been able to read 'This Sunrise of Wonder' in my twenties, not only for its advice on seeing through the eye rather than with the eye, or for the rich vein of writers he quotes, but also for the beautiful setting of the wooden chalet in the Swiss alps from which he writes. But as the apostle writes to those who have just begun to appreciate the wonder of this earth 'No eye has seen, nor ear heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him' what will the redeemed earth be like?'

The book felt wrung dry and rather tedious through the middle chapters but it revived itself towards the end, where the author talks about the shift Jesus wanted in perspective of the first disciples and then going on to talk about the Glory of God. He makes an important point about how as Christians we live almost in contrast to the world.

'It is to enter a foolish, topsy-turvy world, where the first are last and the last first, where value lies in being, not in achieving, where the just law of 'an eye for an eye' is countermanded by the radical action of forgiveness, and where greatness lies in the compassionate, often humdrum, service of others.'

To see the glory and love of God, we have only to look at Jesus. This book has taught me that we, the created, should look at fellow creations with awe but most importantly to look at our Creator with awe and numinosity. Maybe the lead up to Christmas can be a time to start intentionally 'seeing'. For perhaps the greatest wonder of all is love?

-Erinna Pilbeam



This is a picture my grandad took in Switzerland

Pastors Training in Soweto



John & Jenny Miller, new Christ Church mission partners, reflect on the opportunities and challenges they face.



Most aspects of teaching at a Bible college are very similar in any country: The desire to see students grow, not just in knowledge of God's word, but also in faith and love and hope and joy. Helping students see how every part of Scripture points us to Jesus Christ. Encouraging students in their preaching and helping them to grow in confidence in proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Christ. Prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit to change lives and ministries through his word.

There are also different opportunities and challenges faced by each Bible college. John teaches at Johannesburg Bible College (JBC). Challenges for JBC would include the principal and college manager being held up at gunpoint recently; cars and tyres set alight in protests near college last term; no electricity in Soweto for days at a time (though we have some solar back-up); many students arriving at college heavily influenced by prosperity teaching that promises health and wealth to all believers; and many students with limited education and facing real poverty. Youth unemployment in Soweto is well over 50% and students will often be short of food.



Most families have lost multiple relatives through Covid and unemployment has risen still higher due to lockdowns and businesses failing. We are very grateful to Christ Church for helping to provide bursaries for our poorer students in 2021.



However, there are also wonderful opportunities. It is estimated that by 2050, 40% of all Christian believers in the world will live in sub-Saharan Africa. Africa's impact on global Christianity over the next century will be enormous. There are many who are eager to grow in knowing God's Word and to be equipped to plant and lead churches. There are many who are marked by great

evangelistic zeal and prayerful devotion to the Lord. There is also enormous hunger for education and training, and JBC is one of a few government-accredited colleges who can offer training for an accredited practical qualification. We currently have two campuses, in central Johannesburg and Soweto, a nearby township. We are also hoping to start a third campus in Alexandra, another Johannesburg township where a million people live within an area about half the size of Bedford.

John's four main areas of responsibility are leading the Soweto campus, teaching a variety of classes on understanding and teaching the Bible, helping to train staff at JBC and our sister colleges across Africa, and oversight of the course. Jenny home-schools our three boys, David, Matthew and Samuel (aged 9,7 and 6) in the mornings and drives them to a local school for their afternoon sports programme. She is also helping JBC with a new database.

We are very aware that we can only serve in South Africa because of the wonderful team of partners the Lord has provided in the UK. Thank you so much for your prayers, encouragement and generosity.

If you would like to receive monthly or quarterly prayer updates, please email john@jbc.org.za

CULTURE SHOCK

Prioritising the Outsider



LYCiG is all about **Leading Your Church into Growth**, and in mid-October, along with Michael Bishop and Amy Hutchinson, I had the opportunity to go along to High Leigh for the weekend to find out more.

So, what did we take away from the conference? Well, we got together recently to find out and all of our thinking seemed to revolve around one word – **culture**.

What became clear to us during the conference is that the culture of so many churches is inward focussed. William Temple once said, *“The church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members”*. The problem is that the focus or culture of so many churches is to look after those who are members, those who fill the pews each week and form the congregation, rather than prioritising the outsider.

Jesus tells the parable of the lost sheep (Matthew 18:10-14) to show that the Kingdom of God is accessible to all, even those who have strayed from God’s path. He uses the example of a shepherd (God) who has 100 sheep and one goes missing. The shepherd leaves the 99 others and searches high and low for the **one** lost sheep. He prioritises the outsider. Jesus stresses that when the shepherd finds the lost sheep, he rejoices over it more than the 99 who did not go astray. This is how God will rejoice when even just a single person returns to Him.

But does the culture of the church make it difficult to access for those outside of it? What was so surprising is the number of ways our culture can do this without us even realising it!!

The language we use in our churches is great if you’re familiar with it, and know what it means, but what if you’re not. How accessible are the words we use in church, in our liturgy, in our prayers, in our hymns and worship music, to those who are not already members of the church? What about for those who have difficulty reading? Or where English is not their first language? In fact, do we even understand all the words that we use ourselves?

Do churches use too many words in their services? Do older hymns make it even more difficult for people to engage with the language?



This is just one example. Others raised at the conference include how a church welcomes people. Not just the way people are welcomed into the church but whether the church is a welcoming and inviting space to be in. Is it accessible, and not just to those with obvious disabilities? What about for those who are different to us? Do we represent diversity in our churches? Or does the demographic of the church make it inaccessible to some people?

Perhaps some churches focus on establishing a presence in the community without first thinking what presence their community would most welcome. Where is the greatest need in our own community? What support can we provide as witnesses to the Kingdom of God?

How does our culture reflect our strategy? Peter Drucker is often quoted as saying, “*Culture eats strategy for breakfast.*” This quote is essentially saying that it doesn’t matter what things we do as a church, if our culture doesn’t back it up.

The challenge placed before us was to look closely at our culture and see where it does and does not prioritise the outsider. A review of our culture will help us see what things we do well and what might need to be done differently and what things might need to change. This challenge came across as exciting rather than threatening – a way to build for the future confident that he who started a good work in us will complete it! (Philippians 1:6)

What do you think? Come and talk to Michael, Amy or myself. We’d love to hear your thoughts.

-John Bell



Children's Activities at Christ Church - Christmas 2021

Christ Church Nativity Performance:

19th December at 10:30am service.

Children will come straight to the church halls to get into their costumes, before coming into the service to perform. Parents are welcome to join with babies and toddlers to help them.



Practice times:

28th November (10:30 service)

5th December (12:00-13:00) Optional practice for main characters with speaking parts. Please bring a packed lunch.

12th December (10:30 service) Dress rehearsal.



Christmas Party

After the nativity performance on 19th December there will be a party for children in the main hall until 12:15pm.



Forge's Christmas

3 mornings of Christmas fun: stories, crafts, and songs for families of all ages.

Children from Forge afterschool club will be involved in planning and leading the activities. Please book in on Eventbrite or let us know you are planning to come.

Tuesday 21st, Wednesday 22nd and Thursday 23rd from 10:00-11:45 AM.

Christmas Zoom Bake Off

December 19th at 16:00-17:00

Prepare your ingredients beforehand and join to share your Christmas baking skills on zoom.

For children of all ages. The zoom link will be sent out in the notices.



Bonus: When the Christmas tree arrives, we would love children to help with decorating it.
If you'd like to do that, please contact Ruth Hulme.

Christmas Services open to all

Sunday 19th December at 7:00pm

Carol Service

Monday 20th December at 3:00pm

Afternoon Carol Service

Friday 24th December at 4:00pm

Carols on the Church Lawn

Friday 24th December at 11:15pm

Christmas Eve Midnight Communion

Saturday 25th December at 9:00am

Christmas Day Holy Communion

Saturday 25th December at 10:30am

Christmas Day Family Communion





SUNDAY SERVICES

9:00am and 10:30am Morning Services

(We request that facemasks are worn at the **10:30am** Service)

10:30am Livestreamed on Our YouTube channel

7:00pm Sundays@Seven



CONTACTS:

Vicar:

Richard Hibbert 01234 359342
vicar@ccbedford.org

Curate:

John Bell 01234 401509
curate@ccbedford.org

Children's Minister:

Ruth Hulme 07554 537757
children@ccbedford.org

Youth Minister:

Jess Walker 07384 691897
youth@ccbedford.org

Office Manager:

Pauline Grimley 01234 327150
office@ccbedford.org

Bookings Administrator:

Dawn Hire 07788 687011
centre@ccbedford.org

Church Wardens:

Kay Berrington 01234 826866
Andrew Turpie 01234 305762

www.ccbedford.org

Join us at Christ Church
Denmark street, Bedford

