

**AUGUST  
2024**

# Life.



## **All Change**

**Three interviews by  
Alan Cottenden:**

**Richard & Gillian  
Lindley**

**Hannah Applegarth**

**Rev Ben Williams**

**CHRIST CHURCH BEDFORD**

**Transformed by Love Seeking to Serve Experiencing Hope**

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**Thank you to all who have contributed to this edition of Life, especially to Alan Cottenden who did all three interviews!**

**If you would like to help with our church magazine then please drop an email to [vicarspa@ccbedford.org](mailto:vicarspa@ccbedford.org)**

**(Because we do not have an Editor or overseer, we are only able to do these sporadically.)**



You can read this edition online, just go to our website: [CCBedford.org/lifemagazine](http://CCBedford.org/lifemagazine)

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**Life.**



# VICAR'S LETTER



The theme of this magazine is “All Change”! Which seems apt for the season that the church is in, as well as for so many people on a personal level.

At the beginning of the year, I set out a bible verse for 2024, something for us to engage with, live and grow with.

*‘By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.’*

John 13:35 NIVUK

As I have reflected on this verse, I continue to be challenged by it. At this particular point in time, the country has just had a general election leading to a change in government. We have had the horrifying tragedy in Southport. And following this we have had violence and an increase in racism. It is against this backdrop, the church of Christ must stand. But, the stand we must take is the stand of love. If the world is to see Jesus, it will see it in those who are filled with love.

Jesus, again speaking to his disciples said that the pinnacle of love is to lay one's life down (John 15:13). This is the challenge before us. This is the love which will change the world. This is the love which put an end to racism and violence and every act of evil. Love which is willing to die for the other.

I must confess that this scares me. I am not great at dying; dying to self, putting others first. It's hard enough to put my wife and kids first let alone my neighbour. And yet that is the call of Christ to each of us.

What does this love look like in practice? Maybe it is providing a safe space for people who don't look like us? Maybe it means standing up for people who have different religious beliefs than us? Maybe it is inviting our enemies to have dinner with us? Maybe it is putting aside our rights for the sake of those who have no rights. Maybe it is saying sorry to people who we have treated badly? Maybe, there are a lot of maybes. Maybe, we just need to ask Jesus to show us how we love like he did. And then have the courage to do it. Because I do believe that if we ask God, he will answer, and then it is our job to be obedient to him.

## **UPDATE ON FINANCES**

Back in November 2023 I set out a vision for the future. I spoke of three things:

Curate / Youth Worker / Building Repairs.

In that vision I said we needed to raise £250,000 to purchase a new property for the curate to live in, for us to fund a full-time youth worker and to do building work as per the most recent Quinquennial Inspection.

Since then we have raised approximately £115,000. This is amazing. All glory to God. And all thanks to you. Like, wow!

This has meant we have been able to purchase a property for the curate and his family to live in. We have sold the old house on Dudley Street. For the first time in a lifetime Christ Church is debt free. We have appointed a Youth & Student Minister on a three year contract. God is good!

To do this though, we have used the vast majority of our reserves. We do not at present have the finances to be able to do the building repairs as set out in the Quinquennial Report.



And, unless regular giving increases, we will not be able to extend our Youth & Student Minister beyond the three years.

I don't share this to depress us, rather to be open and honest about where we are at. By being open and honest I hope it will aid all of us in our prayers. Please join me in praying for God to provide so that we can look after the building that we are blessed with, and use it for his glorious purposes.

We have just over 100 people who give by standing order. Over the course of a week we see about 200 adults attend services at Christ Church. If the other 100 gave £10 a month, we would see our regular giving increase by £12,000 a year. If everyone who was able to, filled in Gift Aid forms, we could see that giving rise a further 25%.



<https://ccbedford.org/Groups/341342/Giving.aspx>

Please join me in praying. And if you don't already give to the life of the church, please prayerfully consider it.

And if you have any ideas (good, bad, or crazy) for fund raising, then please let me know.

A verse to finish with, from Ephesians chapter 3, verses 20 & 21. This is my prayer of worship at the moment:

***Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.***

God bless you richly,

**REV**  
David Thomas



## **Alan Cottenden Interviews: Richard & Gillian Lindley**

*It's "all change" in the Lindley house-hold. Both Richard and Gillian retired last year and a largely blank canvas stretches out before them. A perfect time – I thought – to ask them to share their story so far and tell us how they are tackling the task of working out what God has for them next.*

**Exciting? Scary?**

Richard: Both at once! The freedom of having fewer responsibilities is wonderful but the absence of fixed

points can be unnerving.

Gillian: It feels like one season is coming to an end and we stand on the threshold of the next, but we don't know yet what that might entail. It reminds me of the famous words in Ecclesiastes: "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens." (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

**How did you come to this point?**

Richard: We've been considering retirement from paid employment for some time, retiring while we're still in good health and able to tackle fresh challenges in an unpaid capacity. We're very much aware that we are very lucky to be in the position where that's even a possibility. Initially, I was looking at retiring from my job running a global tax team in the oil industry in the summer of 2022 but various changes at work meant that it was better to defer for a year until August 2023. I am still doing some consultancy work for my old company but it is less than a day a week and now dropping further. I've a sense that it's time to move on, although I'm not sure yet what to.



Gillian: My last “season” has been largely about child minding and fostering, both of which I paused for 6 months. It felt strange to be without the continual stream of demands that goes with looking after small children! And also without the ever-present possibility that the phone will ring and we’ll be asked – possibly at short notice - to take in a small and needy child who will likely need our attention from 7am to mid-evening, every day. Another big change is that both my parents died last year, adding to the sense of a season coming to an end.

### So: what now?

Gillian: I decided retirement didn’t suit me, a blank diary was unsettling. I now childmind on a part-time basis for two of our Church families. We also were given the opportunity to provide regular respite for other foster carers. God is good and faithful, providing what we need in terms of the right amount of activity and rest.

Richard: I’m prayerfully pushing doors to see what happens. But it can be tough: one door I pushed

on last November - with a lot of confidence that this was the route to go - was very definitely slammed in my face...at least it was clear that wasn’t the way forward. In two other cases I’ve been told, “you could do the role but there is someone more appropriate”- very frustrating.

There are clear plusses though... it was great to have the time to lead the church house sale and purchase earlier in the year. I’m focusing on the voluntary and charitable sectors to see if there might be needs that match my broad financial and organisational skill set, and I’m exploring the possibilities of debt counselling or being a magistrate. It’s been especially helpful to talk with Danny Fenske – formerly at Christ Church – who became a magistrate after he retired as a GP. We’ve a sense that we should probably stay in Bedford, in which case I suspect I will remain involved in the church finances.

But we may consider the possibilities of the overseas mission field.

Gillian: Meanwhile, I'm continuing to help with the small children and parents at Morning Out on Friday mornings. I'm also spending about a day a week supporting the Home of Hope orphanage and school in Malawi that groups of young (and not so young!) people from Christ Church have visited multiple times after Alex Mnatzaganian set up the link around 10 years ago, when he was our youth minister. My role is to increase awareness of the work among other Bedford churches and seek sponsorship. I feel like I'm in a season that's largely waiting for what's next, but not passively. I'm certainly benefitting from a sustained rest. I'm aware, too, that I'm still recovering from losing both my parents quite recently.

Richard: One of the enjoyable consequences of having retired is that we've been able to take a more leisurely approach to things if we want to. For example, I was able to spend three weeks with my two younger daughters travelling in Ecuador and Peru recently. We have also been able to visit our mission partners, the Gayet family in Belgium and the Deneufchâtel in France, and it was great to be

able to do that without having to rush back to meet other commitments.

### **How did you each come to faith?**

Gillian: I grew up in a church-going family in Northern Ireland and made a commitment to follow Jesus when I was 12. The Youth Fellowship at church was very important to me as I grew and I remember - age 19 - becoming more deeply aware of the depth and reality of committing to God's ways. When I left school, I went on to teacher training in Belfast, spending a year in France (as I was majoring in French) and then on to my first teaching job in England. I was actually quite reluctant to move to England - I would have preferred France or Africa - and I intended to stay for a year and return. That was in 1989! For a while, I lived at 159 Dudley Street, next door to the curate's house.

Richard: Growing up, I went along to church - without much personal faith of my own - till I was 18 and spent a gap year in Germany before going to university. In Germany, I visited the local church



where they totally ignored me! So, not much encouragement to grow in faith there! When I got to university in Exeter I bumped into a chap called Ben (with whom I'm still in touch) and got chatting. It was Tam and he told me that he was just off to a prayer meeting, adding, "Why don't you come too?" He later told me he had no idea why he'd asked me as I had given no outward sign of any faith. But I'm very glad he did because I went and, that same night, I gave my life to Christ. God does move in very mysterious ways! I was studying Economics and Geography with a view to becoming an accountant and spent my long vacations doing internships so I was well placed for jobs when I graduated. After accountancy training in London, I reluctantly moved to a job in Milton Keynes in early 1992 and came to live in Bedford at 159 Dudley Street. I chose Christ Church because, at that time, they were taking steps to employ a youth worker for the very first time, which seemed very exciting

**So, did you meet each other at Christ Church?**

Richard: Yes: eventually! We think it was on 12 July 1992, by which time

we'd been around for 6 months without noticing one another.

When post arrived at my house for one Gillian Patterson, who had moved out a year earlier, Carolyn Barnes – another Exeter graduate at the same time as me – introduced us so I could hand over her post.







# HAVE YOU MET HANNAH HAVE YOU MET HANNAH HAVE YOU MET HANNAH

## OUR NEW YOUTH & STUDENT MINISTER YET?

**IF NOT, A TREAT AWAITS  
 YOU! HERE ARE SOME  
 NOTES TO FUEL  
 YOUR FIRST CHAT.**

So Hannah: what do you make of us so far?

Everyone has been so nice! I felt comfortable immediately. I love the range and diversity of what Christ Church is doing. How wonderful to have three very different Sunday services, all seeking to worship God but each going about it differently. Diversity within unity: I love it!



**Tell me about you: how would you describe yourself?**

As I said when Richard Lindley asked me a similar question in an evening service soon after I came: I'm impatient (but with grace!), loud and encouraging. I'm super organised (get that from my Mum) and – in some ways – a bit of a control freak. I like to plan well (so I'm ready for all the things that might happen) and in plenty of time. But, strangely, I also enjoy adjusting to new situations and find that more stimulating than scary. So I'm really enjoying getting to know Christ Church.

I've been involved with many, many churches and it's fascinating finding out how you do things. I love people and generally find they are comfortable opening up to me (get that from my Dad... he's famous for complete strangers sharing their life story with him seconds after they've met!)

## **Did you always want to be a Youth Minister?**

No: I planned to be an actress. I went to music theatre school on Saturdays as a teenager and always got involved in school productions. I left school at 16 and enrolled on a Professional Performing Arts course at Stageworks College in St Neots, where I still live. But about 6 months in God made it very clear that I was not to be a professional actress, which was hard and confusing. So I quit and spent two years doing A-levels, including a placement at my church where I worked alongside our youth leader. She was inspirational and made me realise that I wanted to go into youth work, too. When she moved on, I was asked to lead the youth work myself which – given my part-time job and A-level studies - made for a busy time. I discovered that some training in acting was very useful preparation for youth work: both involve improvisation within a structure. God doesn't waste our experiences!

## **What happened next?**

After A-levels, I considered a theology / youth work degree but opted instead for a JNC (Joint Negotiating Committee) validated degree in Youth Work and Community Development at Derby University. But I never took my A-level exams because of COVID and the country was still under lockdown when I started at Derby in October 2020. After 5 weeks of splendid isolation in

my university room, I decided to return home and study from there. But I did eventually get involved in youth work at St Werburgh Church and some other churches in Derby. (Saint Werburgh became a saint through raising a dead goose to life: I love that!).

After each of my three years of study I got some great vacation jobs with the Groundwork East Youth Team (year 1); the Derby Fire and Rescue Service (year 2); and the Werrington Youth Offenders' Prison (year 3): a wonderful variety. Really encouragingly, all three organisations subsequently offered me jobs. After I graduated in 2023, Werrington asked me if I would work at a new young offenders' prison they were setting up in Feltham and that's where I was working when I heard about and applied for the Christ Church job.

## **What excites you about working with young people?**

I have a particular heart for young people who are "on the edge", who are confused and may feel they don't fit in or belong. I thrive in their chaos (odd for a control freak!) and love creating safe spaces where they can feel comfortable. My dream would be to have a youth centre open 24/7 that provides the stability of a regular, dependable space for them: warmth, food, people who care.



Somewhere they can come any time but especially if – for example – they are anxious about exams or are in conflict with their parents. Space where they can discover constructive ways to express their emotions. The emphasis would be on careful and encouraging listening, seeing the youngsters as people to love rather than problems to fix or pagans to convert. Youth workers have a great advantage over parents and teachers in having little authority. We can advise, but the young people are free to ignore us. However, they're more likely to listen if we take the time to build authentic, unconditional, caring relationships with them.

I'm also concerned for young people in church families, who can get ignored. When my brother and I were growing up, my parents were involved with everything going on at church and people assumed that we must be OK, even when – sometimes – we really weren't and would have appreciated help.

**What have you been doing so far?**

As you can imagine, I've been meeting and chatting with a lot of people, praying and thinking, trying to work out how God wants me to look after the young people we have and reach out to those that we don't. I'm keen to build strong relationships with our local schools and to find ways of creating "safe spaces" where young people will feel comfortable. I've met with the Bedford University Chaplain – who is lovely – and will soon be meeting with her assistant, who is based on the Polhill Campus.

Apparently, most of the students there come from overseas and are doing short courses rather than degree programmes and I need to work out how we can best serve them during their brief stay in Bedford. I really appreciate the freedom that David has given me to explore options. When – at the interview – I asked him what he



saw Christ Church schools work looking like he replied, “What do you want it to look like?” Exciting!

### **How did you come to faith?**

I grew up in a Christian family in Enfield and, when I was little, we often watched animated bible stories on TV, as well as being involved in everything at church. One day – when I was 5 or 6 – one of the programs included an invitation to give my life to Jesus, and I did. And - very memorably - I was eating a chocolate-spread sandwich as I did so! I was baptised aged 9, which was very young for our church but the church leaders must have judged that I knew what I was doing, and I think I did. When I was 14 we moved to St Neots and I remember finding it quite tough adjusting to a new church because – up till then – our Enfield church was the only one I had known.

### **What’s’ God been teaching you lately?**

To lean on him. For everything. Rather than relying on my own strength when I reckon I can manage, and just going to him when things are too hard. He always knows

best, even when I think I’ve got it sorted. The other thing is to keep on listening, even – especially - when God doesn’t answer immediately. Of course, I’ve known these things for years but God seems to be taking me into new depths. Proverbs 3:5&6 have been important to me for as long as I can remember but they’re especially so at the moment: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”

### **What do you like doing for fun?**

Spending time with people, with friends and with family. I meet up with my best friend, Rachel, every week. We do all sorts of things together but often we just chat about whatever. Sometimes – if I’m drained – I need my own space but, usually, I prefer being with people. I also love crochet, and my Grandma is teaching me to sew. And watching Formula 1 on TV. Next year I’m going to experience it first-hand: my parents are buying me tickets for Silverstone for my birthday and Christmas! How cool is that?

HAVE YOU MET HANNAH  
HAVE YOU MET HANNAH  
HAVE YOU MET HANNAH

# SAY HELLO TO OUR NEW CURATE - REV BEN WILLIAMS

## ALL CHANGE



I love hearing about other people's faith journeys, marvelling at the diverse ways God works in the lives of his people. And it's especially interesting when the journey includes such apparent detours and roadblocks as Ben Williams has encountered from his first inklings of being called to ordained pastoral ministry 18 years ago through to arriving in our midst as our new curate. God is awesome, wise and gracious.

- Alan Cottenden

## **So, Ben, let's start at the very beginning: where were you born and raised?**

I grew up in Shefford and my Dad taught at Stephenson School in Bedford, while Mum latterly worked as a pensions clerk in Hitchin. One way or another I used to visit Bedford most weekends, primarily to go shopping, and I sometimes even cycled over. So, I'm quite familiar with the layout of the town. When I was small we belonged to the Anglican church in Shefford where Dad was organist and – for a while – church warden, but my sister gravitated to the Methodist church, drawn by the Junior Church there and – in due course – we all joined her; my parents thought it best for us all to be in the same church. As a teenager, I joined a joint Methodist / Anglican / Baptist youth group in Shefford, where the leaders were really good at taking us all under their wings, encouraging and nurturing. That's where I first sensed the beginnings of a call to ordained pastoral ministry, although I felt this was a possible future calling and decided to focus on youth work.

## **What happened next?**

Rather than going straight to university I spent a gap year in Reading working with a Baptist church, and undertaking training with the Oasis Trust, a Christian organisation set up by Steve Chalke. After Oasis, I studied for a degree in Theology and Music at Canterbury Christ Church University, which is

where I met my wife, Tasha... in the College Chapel. She was a fellow student, studying English Language & Communications Studies and Psychology.

After we got married, we moved to Cheshire where I served as a youth worker across two Methodist Churches, one similar in size and feel to Christ Church, and the other a small fresh expression. This was followed by three years serving in lay ministry for a Methodist Church in Leighton Buzzard, during which time I was aware of a growing conviction of a call to ordained ministry and so I applied for training. The discernment process all seemed to be progressing nicely but – very much to our surprise – I was turned down at the final interview stage. It was very disappointing, confusing and disorientating to have serious doubt cast on what had seemed to us to be clear guidance. My contract with the Methodist church came to an end and I spent two years working as a delivery driver for Tesco. We still felt that we had heard God correctly about my calling, but we needed time to process what had happened and so we sought out a church where we felt we could major on “receiving” for a season.

# ALL CHANGE



# ALL CHANGE

By chance we found a fresh expression Anglican church in Leighton Buzzard. It was wonderfully welcoming and just what we needed. In time, we sensed a fresh stirring of my call to ordained ministry and felt strong enough to start the discernment process again, this time with the Anglican Church. To our delight, I was accepted and we moved to Cambridge so I could start my training at Ridley Hall.

**How did you handle the disappointment and confusion of being turned down for ordained ministry training the first time around?**

We tried to focus on continuing to serve God faithfully in all we were doing, trusting that he was in control and knew what he was doing even if it made little sense to us at the time. Looking back, it's easier to see that God used what looked like a wilderness season to us to serve his purposes. We tend to see "waiting" as something passive but God so often uses "waiting times" to shape us, grow us and prepare us for what he has next and so – challenging as it is – it's good to try to embrace waiting actively. Working for Jesus as a Tesco driver gave me important space to "process my history" and the job provided endless opportunities for me to share my faith. People quickly found out about our church and that

led to many deep conversations about God.

**Did you enjoy your time at Ridley?** Tremendously. I loved the diversity of the students with their endlessly different backgrounds and experiences: a great melting pot of knowledge and amazing opportunities to learn from one another. Mealtimes were very stimulating – helped by the head chef at Ridley being Michelin-star-trained! Imagine munching on your mouth-watering lunch while debating, "Is dignity inherent or ascribed"!

**What excites you most about church? What are we most likely to find you getting stuck into?**

I have a particular passion for those on the margins; those for whom traditional church / community is not really them. They may feel unable to access what we have organised for reasons that are not obvious to us. When I was a youth worker, I often found myself drawn more to the lads sitting outside smoking than I did to those who were inside participating in the planned event. They were uncomfortable at the thought of joining the kids inside: in their eyes, they didn't belong. A sense of belonging is a key facet of community, and people who don't feel they belong feel themselves to be "outside looking in". So, you'll

# ALL CHANGE

probably see me gravitating towards anything that expresses inclusivity, and more importantly belonging!

Something else I'm aware of is the need to major on activities where I can have an impact over the three years that I shall be around, while building sustainably so that it doesn't all fall apart when I leave!

## What's God teaching you just now?

At the moment I am exploring what it may mean to set those with additional needs free from the restraints which church places on them finding belonging. I'm also currently finishing my Master's dissertation exploring how The Eucharist may exclude those with autism, and that's making me think and pray very hard! I'm encouraged that the Church of England is taking a special interest in additional needs, particularly through the work done by Bishop Richard.

## Tell me about Tasha and your girls.

Tasha grew up in Clacton-on-Sea and has worked as a carer in a nursing home for several years, as well as doing church administration and leading a Messy Church. She's also a gifted children's worker and a great parent! She naturally "adopts" families – especially those that are struggling or marginalised.

At Ridley, it was lovely to see her getting alongside the spouses of other students, especially those with young families. Many a cake was baked and delivered! She's also a qualified Guide leader for Rainbow-aged kids.



Phoebe-Grace is 11 and she will be going to Castle-Newnham school after the summer, where she is looking forward to the music and performing arts. Like her sister and parents, Miriam (6) has a heart for others, and can often be found playing with younger children. She will be going to St John Rigby in September. Both girls also particularly enjoy cooking, crafting and reading. As you might imagine, they are not impressed at having to move house again when they've only lived in Cambridge for a short time. So, we are doing our best to accentuate the positives and encourage them to look forward to new experiences. My parents still live in Shefford and having Nanny and Grandad nearer to hand should help sweeten the pill!

What do you like doing for fun?

Listening to – and making - music. Tuba's my main instrument and I've played in brass bands since I was 11. Tasha also plays clarinet and soprano saxophone. We love watching films and TV series and – just recently - we feasted on the nine Star Wars films and the complete TV mini-series. I love “family time”: walking, going to the park, bike rides... And reading: both church stuff and Sci-Fi – especially Terry Pratchett, who has some great one-liners that occasionally find their way into my sermons!



**ALL CHANGE**

BY THIS  
EVERYONE WILL  
KNOW THAT YOU  
ARE MY DISCIPLES,  
IF YOU LOVE ONE  
ANOTHER.'

JOHN 13:35 NIVUK





## Sunday Services

9am & 10:30am Morning Worship

7pm Sundays@Seven

Wednesday Service

10am Holy Communion



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