

God is For Today—GiFT



During our recent interregnum a small but committed group of parents asked if they could restart the youth group using its original name, GiFT. Two had very successfully helped to run the earlier group in Stourdene Benefice before it closed.

To have good people offering to reopen the group was too good an opportunity to miss and one dark cold Thursday night in late January

the group re-emerged with a handful of young people meeting once every two weeks in the church at Ettington.

The leaders received some informal but inspirational training from Esther Loxley, the youth worker in Shipston, and were joined for this by some junior leaders – older teenagers who had been in the original group and wanted to help it restart.

There is a tuck shop and assorted activities that are wrapped around a theme which is currently “Harvesting our Talents”. Soon they will look at “Dark and Light” with themes relating to the Church’s calendar but designed to suit young people. Towards Christmas they aim to prepare an entry for the Ettington Christmas Tree Festival.

Earlier in the year, GiFT followed homelessness as their theme and as part of that they held a sleepover in Ettington Church one evening in July. The evening began with a barbeque which was very well supported by the local community and included a film prepared by Shelter, the charity for the homeless. There were also some games like eating donuts on the end of a string! The sleepover was a sponsored event and together with donations, around £300.00 was raised for the work of Shelter. This was followed up by a very powerful session where someone who had been homeless himself spoke of his experiences as a homeless person. The popularity of this evening has helped to boost numbers and goodwill for the GiFT.

By many standards this is a small group but it is growing steadily and presenting the Gospel message in a practical and relevant way to young people in a small rural community. It is a real beacon of light, hope and encouragement in our rural ministry.

The Revd John Horton



Prayer Diary

November 2017

The Sheepdog



Much of my driving is along country lanes, with fields spreading out on either side. On one side the fields slope gently, and one of our local sheep farmers was standing there, gazing intently into the distance.

‘What are you looking at?’ asks I. ‘Bringing my sheep home,’ he replies. ‘Surely you can’t do that from here?’ ask I. ‘No,’ says he, ‘but my dog can. I know I can trust her to bring them safely home.’

And there, several fields and several hundred yards away, his dog was faithfully and quietly rounding up his flock of sheep, and bringing them safely home. ‘I trust her to bring them safely home’. An enduring image, which spoke beautifully of the way in which God trusts us to bring his sheep safely home. Like the sheep dog, we may have to go quite a long way from home, and sometimes they can take a bit of rounding up, but that is what we are tasked to do – go out to wherever they are, seek them out, and bring them safely home.

God trusts us: he trusts us with the gospel itself, and he trusts us to take it to the furthest corners. He trusted the first disciples, and there was no Plan B if they failed. He trusts us to care for his sheep. He has taught us, and continues to teach us, what to do. And he watches intently, with us every step of the way. The sheepdog’s acute hearing is finely tuned to her master’s voice – she has to keep listening. She is being his hands and feet, eyes and ears, working together in this task. We too have to keep listening, and be God’s hands and feet, eyes and ears.

It is an awesome responsibility for the dog: the care of the sheep is placed in her charge. It is an even more awesome responsibility for us: God places the care of his sheep in our charge, and trusts us to find them and bring them back to him.

Revd Jill Tucker
Dean of Self-Supporting Ministry

Being a pioneer minister in a benefice of seven rural churches

I joined Coventry Diocese a year ago taking up a post as pioneer and associate minister in the south Warwickshire seven benefice of churches. When I first saw the post advertised I confess I wasn't really that sure of what being a pioneer in a rural area involved. I'm still not that sure but here are some of my reflections.



Being a pioneer in a rural setting involves being willing to talk about Jesus outside the walls of our church buildings. This may not seem especially revolutionary but there is a definite sense here that talk about God should be kept to church services on a Sunday. In an era where the majority of the population went to church this wasn't such a problem. But when only a minority come to church regularly and when a majority would struggle even to step into a church building, taking the Gospel outside the walls of the church has become an absolute necessity.

Doing this in our culture involves a high degree of relational investment. In our benefice we have very limited resources both in terms of people and money so an approach to mission which focuses on events and programmes is ultimately unworkable. To communicate the Gospel effectively in this setting therefore involves the slow and often costly work of sharing people's lives, gaining their trust and opening up opportunities to 'give a reason for the hope that we have.' Happily in the villages I minister this often means time spent in the pub or eating food in people's homes!

The bible verse which best summarises this dual aspect comes from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians

Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. (1 Thess. 2:8)

This of course is what all Christians are called whether lay or ordained, pioneer or not. As a pioneer I hope to model, in a flawed and imperfect way, this calling that each of us have. To share both our lives and the Gospel with a world that desperately needs to hear of Jesus. May God give us the grace and strength we need to fulfil this calling.

The Revd Ben Dyson

Moving into rural ministry

When thinking about coming to serve in Brailes, Sutton under Brailes, Tysoe, Oxhill and Whatcote I tried to find out what was special about these places. Drina and I tried to visit incognito but found that it was impossible to enter into these villages without being spotted. We were struck by the feeling that this was a special place and this was confirmed by the welcome we received from the people. Moving into rural ministry was something new to me and was a complete change from everything I had experienced in town and city ministry before.



I was struck by the community spirit in each one of the villages but also surprised that these communities seemed to work as independent groups, not sharing with the other villages in the benefices. Whilst that strong sense of individual community is a very powerful force I wonder how much more can be achieved by working together. Great steps had been made in that direction in many areas and I hope to be able to build on that work.

When I came for the interview virtually everyone said "you know it will be challenging" and they weren't wrong. But another way to look at a challenge is to see it as an opportunity. After being licensed on Wednesday night I had my first funeral in my new post on the Friday and on Saturday the Scarecrow Festival at Oxhill, the Church and School Fair at Brailes and the Church fair at Tysoe! Then on the Sunday in addition to officiating at three services and calling into a fourth there was the Centenary Celebration of Tysoe WI in the afternoon.

Yes they were right, it is challenging, but one thing Rural Ministry is not, is boring! If people try to tell you it's quiet and there's nothing happening then they are mistaken. The Gospel in the community and the church are very much alive and active in the countryside, if you don't believe me come and see for yourself.

The Revd George Heighton

Fri 24

Today is 'Buy Nothing Day.' The developed countries take up only 20% of the earth - yet we use up over 80% of the planet's natural resources. This leads to environmental damage and an unfair wealth distribution. Today you need do just one thing: buy nothing! Please pray for this initiative.

Sat 25

Today a Confirmation Service will take place at Coventry Cathedral. We pray for the candidates being confirmed. Please pray that their faith will be broadened and deepened as they go out in the power of the Spirit.
*Catherine of Alexandria, Martyr, 4th century
*Isaac Watts, Hymn Writer, 1748

Sun 26

Christ the King

We praise God for Christ the King! We reflect on Isaac Watt's hymn 'When I survey the Wondrous Cross'. We pray that we might be renewed in our love to God. "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."

Mon 27

South Warwickshire Seven. Clergy: Stuart Allen, Ben Dyson, Anthony Wells, Hugh Williams. Readers: Lesley Gubbins, Clare Wells, Elaine Hobday. Please pray for God's Minions, our Benefice youth group, led by Kim and Jules. Also pray for the eight young people considering baptism and/or confirmation, to want to commit publicly to following Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

Tue 28

Today we pray for Bishop Christopher who is chairing a meeting of the Church of England's Faith and Order Commission.
We pray for the Diocesan Finance Group which meets this morning.

Wed 29

Ettington Primary School. Headteacher: D Johnson. We thank God for this school community and pray for God's blessing on the pupils, teachers, staff and governors.
*Day of Intercession and Thanksgiving for the Missionary Work of the Church

Thu 30

Andrew the Apostle

On St Andrew's Day we pray for all those who, like Andrew, seek to be the fishers of men. We pray for missionary societies and all who respond to serve the church worldwide.
We pray also for Bishop John who is joining the Archbishop of Canterbury's retreat for bishops from the province.

Cycle of Prayer - November 2017

With a focus on parishes and schools in Shipston Deanery

Wed 1

All Saints' Day

Today is National Stress Awareness Day, which aims to celebrate helping people beat stress. The theme this year is "Speak Up and Speak Out about Stress." We pray for all who are facing stress at work and in other environments.

Thu 2

We pray for Sarah Hills, Coventry Cathedral's Canon for Reconciliation Ministry, as she travels to Canada to visit Community of the Cross of Nails partners.
*Commemoration of the Faithful Departed (All Souls' Day)

Fri 3

We thank God for those who serve on committees and working groups in parishes, deaneries and the diocese.
*Richard Hooker, Priest, Anglican Apologist, Teacher of the Faith, 1600
*Martin of Porres, Friar, 1639

Sat 4

Ilmington, Tredington and neighbouring parishes. Clergy: Chris Goble. Readers: Malcolm Davies, Anthony Nicholl, Roz Wakefield. We thank God for a deepening care for our creation, and interest in eco church. We pray for the appointment of an associate minister.
We pray for Diocesan Synod which meets today.

Sun 5

4th Sunday before Advent

Stourdene Benefice. Clergy: Sharon Goble and John Horton. We give thanks for all the opportunities in the six parishes to make and forge good relationships across age ranges. We pray that together we may learn how to reach out to and serve these village communities better and for our church buildings to be beacons of hope in a world of change.

Mon 6

Brailes Primary School. Headteacher: Heather Childs. We thank God for this school community and pray for God's blessing on the pupils, teachers, staff and governors.
*Leonard, Hermit, 6th century
*William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, Teacher of the Faith, 1944

Tue 7

November is Lung Cancer Awareness month. We pray for all who have been diagnosed, and for all who are undergoing chemotherapy. We pray also for members of their families who surround and support them.
We pray for the Glebe Committee which meets this afternoon.
*Willibrord of York, Bishop, Apostle of Frisia, 739

Wed 8

We pray for Linda Wainscot and all those who work with her at the Diocesan Board of Education as the annual DBE Headteachers' Conference takes place today. We give thanks to God for all that the DBE do supporting, managing, caring for and inspiring schools in the diocese.
*The Saints and Martyrs of England

Thu 9

Brailles & Sutton, with Tysoe, Oxhill & Whatcote. Clergy: George Heighton, Jill Tucker, George Warner & Tom Moffatt. Reader: Jennie Rake. We give thanks for all who supported us through our vacancy. We pray that we may build upon the cooperation between the churches and welcome a new associate minister to join us to spread the love of Christ in this place.

Fri 10

We thank God for all those who serve as clergy in the diocese. We pray for strength and energy, especially during this busy term. We remember those who are struggling in ministry and ask for God's blessing on them.
*Leo the Great, Bishop of Rome, Teacher of the Faith, 461

Sat 11

We pray for those who will be gathering at Coventry's Memorial Park for tomorrow's Remembrance Day Service; and for Bishop Christopher who will be leading that service. We also pray for Remembrance Sunday services taking place across the diocese.
*Martin, Bishop of Tours, c.397

Sun 12

3rd Sunday
before Advent

"O God of truth and justice, we hold before you those men and women who have died in active service. As we honour their courage and cherish their memory, may we put our faith in your future; for you are the source of life and hope, now and for ever. Amen."

Mon 13

Today is the first day of Anti-Bullying Week. The theme this year is 'All Different, All Equal'. The aim is to help children and young people understand the ways in which they are unique. We pray for all who are being bullied, and for initiatives that aim to prevent bullying.
*Charles Simeon, Priest, Evangelical Divine, 1836

Tue 14

Today is World Diabetes Day, a day when millions of people around the world come together to raise awareness of diabetes and what it is like to live with the condition. We pray for everyone living with diabetes.
We pray for the Investment Sub-Committee which meets today.
*Samuel Seabury, first Anglican Bishop in North America, 1796

Wed 15

Today we pray for the Diocesan Board of Education who are running a morning workshop at Alveston Primary School on Christianity as a Worldwide Faith with Jane Butcher from Barnabas in Schools.
We pray for the Glebe Committee which meets this afternoon.

Thu 16

Ilmington Primary School. Headteacher: Carol Ryninks. We thank God for this school community and pray for God's blessing on the pupils, teachers, staff and governors.
*Margaret, Queen of Scotland, Philanthropist, Reformer of the Church, 1093
*Edmund Rich of Abingdon, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1240

Fri 17

We pray for Bishop John who will be attending the 10th annual Reconciliation Day of the Community of the Cross of Nails Centre of the Martin Luther Memorial Church in Berlin tomorrow.
*Hugh, Bishop of Lincoln, 1200

Sat 18

This is Alcohol Awareness Week. Issues with alcohol seem to be increasing, with more and more school children regularly drinking alcohol. We pray for those whose lives are being damaged by drink, and for the impact this has on family and friends.
*Elizabeth of Hungary, Princess of Thuringia, Philanthropist, 1231

Sun 19

2nd Sunday
before Advent

Newbold and Tredington Primary School. Headteacher: Sam Welsby. We thank God for this school community and pray for God's blessing on the pupils, teachers, staff and governors.
*Hilda, Abbess of Whitby, 680
*Mechtild, Béguine of Magdeburg, Mystic, 1280

Mon 20

We pray for Bishop Christopher who is on duty at the House of Lords this week.
*Edmund, King of the East Angles, Martyr, 870
*Priscilla Lydia Sellon, a Restorer of the Religious Life, 1876

Tue 21

Shipston on Stour with Tidmington, Honington and Idlicote. Clergy: Jill Tucker and Sarah Bourne. Reader: Alison Tomkinson. We thank God for the Bible study groups which have been established, and for Shipston becoming a dementia-friendly town. Please pray for the appointment of a new ecumenical Youth Worker to work in the community.

Wed 22

We pray for all those attending Bishop's Certificate in Discipleship and Mission modules. We thank God for those who are organising and facilitating these courses and pray that they would provide environments for rich learning and growth.
*Cecilia, Martyr at Rome, c.230

Thu 23

Tysoe Primary School. Headteacher: Jenny Coates. We thank God for this school community and pray for God's blessing on the pupils, teachers, staff and governors.
*Clement, Bishop of Rome, Martyr, c.100