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# City church defends asylum seeker work

A Norwich church, which has reached out to asylum seekers over the past few years, has rejected recent national media criticism about false conversions and said the Holy Spirit has been at work in their hearts. **Anna Heydon** reports.

**B**owthorpe Church is an ecumenical partnership led by Rev Mark Elvin. The involvement with asylum seekers began when he became aware of a group of asylum seekers who had arrived in a nearby hotel, through a previous church contact in Basingstoke in Hampshire, where the men had been transferred from after they fled from Iran, South Sudan and Guinea. The church reached out to them, and a number of them began to come along to the church. Some had escaped their home countries because they had faced persecution as a result of becoming Christians, others for political reasons or to escape war. Several of those who weren't yet Christian began exploring faith, with some choosing to take the step of baptism. It's a topic which is controversial at the moment, but Mark is unshaken: "In terms of the media storm about false conversions of asylum seekers, there may be a very small minority that falsely convert to Christianity in order to gain asylum, but it is only going to be



a small number in comparison to the many who convert to Christ because the Holy Spirit has been at work in their hearts. "Yet, even if there are some who falsely convert, it shows just how desperate they are to leave their former home country. Just converting or claiming to have converted isn't enough to gain asylum in Britain. The Home Office will do proper checks on each one. However, even if some have falsely converted, they will have heard the gospel and received a warm welcome in churches, something that can only be a good thing." Mark feels he has had his eyes opened by meeting these men: "Hearing their stories and what they've gone through makes me think, gosh, don't we have it easy here? They have had to flee,

whether it was war or poverty or flee simply because they have given their lives to Christ." He gives the example of one Iranian man whose wife rang him up while he was at work to tell him not to come home because the secret police were raiding their house and had taken his computer and documents. She told him that if he came home he would be killed. He left his wife and children, escaped hiding under a lorry, and hasn't gone home since. Another man walked all the way from Iran to the UK. The only part he didn't walk was the boat he got on to cross the English Channel. By that stage he had run out of money and couldn't afford a life jacket. However he told Mark that he believed: "if God has got me this far, He's going to get me across this bit of water." Mark reflects: "That's the thing I find with each of them: they've got amazing faith." Mark explains how the church translates the service each week into Farsi, they have run the Alpha course in Farsi, given each asylum seeker a Bible in their own language and run the Joining the Family course for existing church members and asylum seekers to be part of together. An Iranian lady who was baptised at Bowthorpe church just a few months before the asylum seekers arrived is also able to support with translation. They have also worked together with Holy Trinity Church in Norwich which

■ Continued on page 8.

## Digital boost to Norfolk church unity

Churches Together in Norfolk and Waveney (NWCT) and Network Norfolk have launched a new online partnership which they hope will enhance church unity, a key aim of both organisations, across the region.

■ The Network Norfolk team have been working with County Ecumenical Officer Dr Ian Watson to re-launch the [nwct.org.uk](http://nwct.org.uk) website as the latest partner site within the long-established Norfolk Christian news website. It joins websites from Celebrate Norfolk, Transforming Norwich, The Norfolk Christian Football League, Good News for Norwich & Norfolk and Norwich FGB among others as a Network Norfolk partner. Network Norfolk editor Keith Morris has redesigned the NWCT site with a modern-looking responsive website using the Hubb.Church web system. The content has been provided by Ian and includes bi-monthly ecumenical updates, the background to NWCT, details on Local Ecumenical Partnerships and the seven partner denominations. Keith said: "It has been great working with Ian and the church leaders because Network Norfolk shares their goal of helping churches work together more closely to help build up the Kingdom of God across our region. Helping the entire Norfolk Christian community to communicate and connect is what we are all about." Ian said: "Since starting my role as County Ecumenical Officer in November, my priority for NWCT, is to make more visible and available details of national, regional and local ecumenical activities. It is also to better align the message of Christian unity with other local ecumenical projects and initiatives." "Partnering with the ecumenical website Network Norfolk, which I believe is the premier network for Christian news in Norfolk, offers the best opportunity to do so. It is mutually beneficial. For NWCT it gives us access to a much greater number of people to promote, encourage and support ecumenism. For Network Norfolk, it gives their subscribers and other partners more direct access to ecumenical information and support tools from NWCT and CTE. I am excited and looking forward to working together to support and encourage each other in serving the people of our great county." If you would like to sign up for the regular NWCT ecumenical update, email [web@networknorwich.co.uk](mailto:web@networknorwich.co.uk) [nwct.org.uk](http://nwct.org.uk)



GOOD NEWS

FOR NORWICH & NORFOLK

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# Ben’s message of hope after tragedy

After losing his twin brother Dan to cancer, Norfolk creative **Ben Lawrence** gave up music for a while but has now released his debut album. **Peter Bending** reports.

Growing up, Ben and Dan were a creative double act, spending their formative years together, writing songs, playing in bands, and making films. Dan died in 2016, aged 25, almost two years after being diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour.

“To be honest, after Dan died, I kind of wanted to leave a lot of things behind. We grew up making music together and playing in bands, and it hurt to pick up a guitar or play music with friends without him,” said Ben.

“About a year after his death, I realised I hadn’t been taking good care of my mental health and I needed to step away from some things. Music was something that I put to one side for a time, until it felt right to start writing songs again.”

That time came when the world ground to a standstill. “I had experienced this

tragic loss, and then the pandemic hit,” said Ben. “It seemed like lots of people were experiencing grief and loss in a way we hadn’t felt before. It was as though these songs now meant something to other people too, so I felt like I needed to make this record.”

Ben began developing his sound at his home studio in Norwich, crafting nine full length songs and three instrumentals. It became clear that this was the moment to do this and do it properly.

“My home demos sounded great, but they would have lacked that extra excellence to take these songs as far as they can go. I always wanted this project to help people going through loss and mental health struggles, so I had to do whatever I could to make sure they were able to reach as many ears as possible,” he said.

“Over the years I’ve made a lot of ‘budget’ projects, from EPs recorded at home

when Dan and I were teenagers, to film projects with almost no budget. As this project developed and grew, I started to feel like it might be too much for me to see through on my own.”

So, he asked for help. Ben ran a successful crowdfunding campaign, that ultimately raised over £10,000, and started to connect with Iain Hutchison, a producer based in Glasgow.

In 2022, Ben and his band travelled to Glasgow four times, spending over a month in the studio with Iain, crafting the sound and shape of the album. Iain also travelled to Norwich, where they recorded a full string section. Additional strings were recorded in Billericay, along with additional tracking sessions in Norwich and collaborations from musicians as far as Redding, California.

In 2023, Ben and Iain worked tirelessly to mix each track, spending countless hours and late nights fine tuning each song and the album was released on November 24.

Cautious of being pigeonholed as a Christian musician, Ben approaches music with the same care and consideration he applies in his life and faith.

“My aim with music has always been to write songs that sound as good as mainstream music and talk about my experience of life, which happens to include my faith. I want my music to reach new people with hope and talk about my experiences authentically. “I think those of us who knew Dan



Ben Lawrence.

have been through a life changing experience since 2016. He was such an influential person, especially in his work with Youth for Christ and other projects we’d led over the years. This album has, in some ways, given people an excuse to talk about him, about life and about death. Sometimes we’re a bit scared to say the things that actually matter most, so I hope these songs have given the people I love an excuse to talk, to listen and to be honest.

“The phrase ‘keep on moving’, has been something I’ve said a lot since Dan’s death. My song ‘Moving’ was one of the first that I wrote after he passed away, it’s an anthem for pursuing life in the face of loss. The phrase has slotted itself into a bit of ‘who I am’ and what I want people to take away from my music, my writing and my films.”

Ben isn’t searching for fame or looking to quit the day job – which happens to be making films for the Methodist Church of Great Britain. “Creating this album ‘O Wide World’ has been a journey of faith. Making this record was like stepping into something I know God has been calling me to do for a long time, but it wasn’t easy, and it definitely taught me to trust God more.

“My hope is that this album connects deeply with those who have suffered bereavement, but also that it becomes a soundtrack of hope to people’s everyday lives. This album has been an incredibly life affirming project for me.”

O Wide World is available to download and stream now.

[benlawrence.co.uk](http://benlawrence.co.uk)



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# Prayer vital in cancer battle

A Norfolk Catholic family have spoken of the vital role of prayer and community support as, with amazing medical care, they nurse their four-year-old son through a tough battle against a rare form of leukaemia. **Joshua Clovis** reports.

James Gillespie has been navigating a challenging battle since Christmas Eve 2020 when, at just one-year-old, he was rushed to hospital following a period of illness and unresolved infections. It was discovered that James has a rare form of leukaemia (MPAL) requiring immediate surgery and intense chemotherapy and a probable 3-4 years of ongoing treatment.

Following surgery on Christmas Day and intense chemotherapy on Boxing Day, James suffered a stroke, requiring more long-term care and treatment.

Throughout their journey, James’s parents, David and Anne-Marie Gillespie have been steadfast in their support, balancing the demands of James’s treatment with the needs of their five other children, travelling back and forth from Norfolk to Addenbrooke’s Hospital.

After being diagnosed with MPAL in 2020, initial treatment plans for James faced significant problems. The chemotherapy was not yielding the desired results even after six rounds, and the situation became dire, necessitating a 100% bone marrow match donor.

Miraculously, Faith, James’s older sister, proved to be a perfect match. Faith, aged 15, and with ongoing GCSEs, underwent a 4.5-hour operation to extract bone marrow from her lower back, demonstrating immense courage and love for her brother. Following this, James was transferred to Bristol Children’s Hospital in April 2021 to receive the bone marrow transplant from Faith. The family endured a four-month separation due to post-Covid restrictions, a period that was incredibly challenging as only Anne-Marie could stay with James.

The financial and emotional toll of James’s illness prompted the local community to set up fund raising events and an online page. This initiative has provided vital support, helping to cover medical expenses, travel costs, and other family needs. The fundraiser also contributed toys to the Addenbrooke’s Children’s Ward, bringing joy to children facing similar battles.

However, the journey took another heart-wrenching turn on September 29, 2023 when, after 2 years and 6 months in remission, James relapsed. The prognosis was daunting, with very limited chances of recovery. Yet, despite this, Dr Rob Wynn from Manchester Children’s Hospital extended a lifeline. Dr Wynn, leading a Cord Transplant Trial with promising results, proposed an innovative approach for James – a second intensive transplant using cord blood cells and granulocytes.

On January 11, James had the second



Pictured left is James Gillespie and, right, with mother Anne-Marie. Pictures from the family.

vital cord cell transplant. Post-surgery, he is now being monitored by doctors and nurses, and will be on many medications for a while. James could be in Manchester for up to eight months while he goes through intensive recovery.

James is the youngest of six children and his parents David, a self-employed painter and decorator, and Anne-Marie, a self-employed carer, met as teenagers. Anne-Marie will be James’s main carer while he recuperates in Manchester, and she has spoken of the family’s journey and how important prayer has been through everything they have gone and are going through.

“James has astounded every doctor in the four hospitals we have been to and overcome mountains, especially when we were told he would not make it. This was even when he was on life-support and we were told there was nothing more they could do,” she said.

“We asked everybody to pray harder than they had ever prayed before, even people who didn’t know him. A few days later, James woke up from his coma, leukaemia-free, and the infection, which they said had spread to his brain and organs, had gone. There were no words to be said except thanks be to God.”

The medical team was astonished at James’s recovery, said Anne-Marie: “The doctors still can’t believe his current condition. His latest test shows he is

still disease-negative, which is unbelievable, not just to us but also to the consultants nationwide who are watching and learning from his treatment.”

Fr Andrew Eburne, the Parish Priest at Our Lady of the Annunciation, Poringland, the parish of the Gillespie family, stated: “It is a privilege to have James and his family in our parish. They are a great example of faith and trust in God, no matter how difficult our circumstances.

“Despite the demands of James’s treatment, the family continue to be an important part of the parish, and his brother and sister are continuing with their First Holy Communion classes this year.

“We are praying that the family can be all together for their First Holy Communion on the feast of Corpus Christi.

“James and his family are a reminder of the teaching of St John Paul II, that those who are sick are not actually a burden but have a great value in themselves, and that they can be a great gift to the church and to the community. James is just such a gift, and the parish are united in praying for him and his family.”

For more details or to make a donation, visit [www.gofundme.com/f/james-mpal-journey](http://www.gofundme.com/f/james-mpal-journey)

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# Roll back the stone for new beginnings

Rev Andrew Bryant, the Canon for Mission and Pastoral Care at Norwich Cathedral, encourages us to roll back any stones in our lives which restrict our walk with God.



■ It is early on the first day of the week and the women that have faithfully followed Jesus throughout his ministry are making one last pilgrimage. They are going to his grave to embalm his body with herbs and spices. It is their last act of devotion, a private and personal farewell.

Beside their fear of the religious authorities, which is why they make this journey early in the morning, they face one other very significant practical problem. How will they remove the large stone that has been rolled in front of the grave to seal it? But when they arrive the stone has already been rolled back and they discover the grave is empty. Something stirs within them.

It will take time for them to realise the full significance of these events but the dawning of their awareness of the resurrection of their Lord and Saviour begins with the rolling back of the stone.

We all live our lives sealed behind a stone of assumptions that believes that life must be lived in a certain way, our assumptions of how things are ordered, of the priorities that matter most. On that first Easter Day, the world view of those first disciples was turned upside down, all their certainties are turned inside out. The end of everything had become the beginning of all things.

We all need to allow the stone that limits the love in our hearts, that reins in the imagination of our minds, that shackles our faith and trust, to be rolled back. Easter says: let the stone be rolled back and start again, begin afresh, take a new path, be open to new possibilities. Though we have known and endured the darkest hour on Good Friday, with God all things are possible, endings becomes beginnings, love cannot be defeated.

God longs to roll back the stone in our lives, that we may discover life in all its fullness and discover a closer walk with God.



# United front in Norwich when 42 bishops visited

Over 40 Anglican and Catholic bishops convened in Norwich on January 30 and 31, in a joint meeting for services and group discussions about the ways in which the two denominations can work together more closely, as well as understanding each other better. Keith Morris reports.

The 42 bishops, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby and the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Vincent Nichols, met at St John's Cathedral for Midday Prayers followed by lunch in the Cathedral Narthex.

From there they visited the St Julian Shrine on Rouen Road where they heard from Fr Richard Stanton, the Shrine's Priest Director. A fraternal walk through the streets of Norwich followed to the Anglican Cathedral.

The opening session of the meeting, which is only held once every two years, in the Weston Room was an opportunity to hear from some of those involved in the coronation of HM King Charles III.

The Coronation, a service rooted in tradition and Christian symbolism, was led by Archbishop Welby, who offered a reflection on the historic event. Cardinal Nichols, the first Catholic archbishop to have a formal role in a coronation service for 400 years, also gave a personal reflection.

Choral Evensong in the Cathedral was followed by a drinks reception and dinner at Bishop's House, hosted by the Bishop of Norwich the Rt Rev Graham Usher.

The second session looked at the Synodal journey in the Catholic Church. Short reflections were offered by three attendees who travelled to Rome for last October's Synod: Archbishop John Wilson of Southwark, National Ecumenical Officer, Fr Jan Nowotnik, and Bishop Martin Warner of Chichester, the Church of England representative.

The final session focused on the Catholic Church's newest English saint, John Henry Newman – a lecture on the Victorian educationalist was offered by theologian and renowned Newman scholar Monsignor Roderick Strange, Rector of Mater Ecclesiae College.

Bishop of East Anglia, the Rt Rev Peter Collins, was due to be co-hosting the meeting with Bishop Graham as the lead, but was unwell and unable to attend.

Speaking just before the meeting started, Bishop Graham said: "A lot of our visible unity is through social action, through our life of prayer, through our sense of being together."

"Archbishop Justin and Pope Francis have been together in Rome over the last

few days, along with East Anglia's Bishop Peter, commissioning bishops to be evangelists in their communities in pairs – an Anglican bishop with a Catholic one. I have a very strong working relationship with Bishop Peter on many different levels.

"To mark the 650th anniversary of Julian of Norwich's Shewings, Pope Francis wrote a reflection which looks at what Mother Julian says to our current age of war, famine, pandemic and ecological disaster. In her own age she knew three waves of the Black Death in this city and she probably saw two thirds of the population die," said Bishop Graham.

"Mother Julian said that God is Lord of the Church so that we don't have to be and that in God all things will be well, all manner of things shall be well. I hope that as the bishops meet in this fine city that has a long history of hospitality that they will be inspired by our time of prayer, pilgrimage and study together.

"God's Holy Spirit will inspire us and out of that will come incredible new ways of serving God's church and serving Christ in our midst and you cannot predict what that will be but God has a way of always surprising us.

St John's Cathedral Dean, Fr Alan Hodgson, said: "Since becoming a diocese we have become more closely allied with the Anglican Cathedral in Norwich and it is always a great joy to us to meet at ecumenical events in both cathedrals. There is a great spirit of cohesion and we always work towards that."

# Royal honour for Norfolk chaplain Albert

Rev Albert Cadmore, teacher, priest and chaplain, from Gorleston, has spoken of his surprise at receiving a British Empire Medal (BEM) in the New Year's Honours list. Anna Heydon reports.

Albert has described how it felt to discover that he had been chosen to receive a BEM in the 2024 New Year's Honours list, explaining: "I was humbled because it was quite clear that a lot of people had submitted supporting information and that's very very special."

Albert's astonishment springs partly from a genuine sense of modesty about what he has achieved. He describes his role as a chaplain as being "very ordinary... it is such a privileged role of being close to people that you're really care for and are able to support."

Albert has fulfilled numerous roles during his lifetime, and the fact that several of these were mentioned in his award nomination, stretching back to his time as a PE teacher which started in 1968, seems to be evidence that Albert is not just valued for the roles that he has fulfilled, but his dedication and compassion in everything he has done.

During his time working in education Albert was already making his mark on the local community: he was chairman of the Great Yarmouth Schools' Football Association, chairman of the Yarmouth Basketball League and then the Norfolk Basketball Association. Throughout his discussion of this time in his life, Albert mentions the students he continues to support and encourages to this day, talking with pride about their achievements. His involvement and influence in education have continued through his role as patron at East Norfolk College and governor at Lynn Grove Academy.

Albert is also an ordained Church of England priest, and was a non-stipendiary minister in the Horsey and Somerton parishes for many years. He explains why he enjoys working in rural parishes, saying that even for those who don't go to church, "so long as you actually make yourself seen and get involved in things that happen in the community, you're their vicar. And that is a very, very privileged position, which I loved." He continues to worship in the churches there.

However it is in chaplaincy roles that Albert Cadmore is now probably best known. The list of organisations and people for which he has been or is currently chaplain is long: Gorleston Football Club, Norwich City Football Club, Norfolk County Council, Norfolk and Suffolk Youth Football League and the High Sheriff of Norfolk. He has also been chaplain to eight different mayors of Great

Yarmouth including Penny Carpenter, the current mayor.

But Albert's longest-standing chaplaincy role has been with the RNLI at the Gorleston and Great Yarmouth Lifeboat station. He explains how he got involved: "Being a Gorleston boy, I've always been in awe of those who go to sea on the lifeboats. And as a small boy, I can remember the maroons going off, and that sense of the unknown that they were going out into."

"In 1989 I was invited to conduct a remembrance Sunday service on the lifeboat which was held just off the pier. Then we'd take wreaths and lay them at sea and I've been there ever since."

As well as chaplain for the Great Yarmouth and Gorleston RNLI he is also chair of the management group. He says he was also "honoured" to be offered and accept the role of chair of the fundraising guild in 2021, as since its inception in 1924 it had been a women's group, and Albert was the first man to join.

When asked about the essence of chaplaincy, Albert responds: "Chaplaincy to me can be defined very simply. It's a spiritual dimension to the involvement with a sporting club or organisation. But in practical terms, it is really about building relationships, and specifically supportive relationships, so that you are a known, supportive friend, not just when times are bad, but also when there's celebration, you're there for that too."

"It's all about the people... I really care about the people I'm supporting, so I'm pleased to see them achieving. But when you go and watch Norwich for example and somebody's having a bad spell, and the crowd are on their back, one of the things I find really grates for me is that they always shout things at them as just a surname. They're impersonalised, and yet I'm feeling for that individual."

When asked which aspect of his life he feels has had most impact, Albert mentions another aspect of his involvement with the RNLI: "The most impactful involvement I have is I hope as a water safety volunteer speaking to schools and youth groups and the young people about water safety. In the last year, 2023, I did actually speak to almost 4,000 young people on that whole theme of water safety and I hope that I have positively influenced them."

## Can you help the Good News reach its readers?

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Norfolk chaplain Rev Albert Cadmore who has been honoured by King Charles III.

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Gwilym Davey, new director of Norwich Youth for Christ.

## Gwilym is excited about his new role as Director of Norwich Youth for Christ

Christian youth charity **Norwich Youth for Christ** has appointed city youth worker **Gwilym Davey** as its new Director. Here he introduces himself.

■ I am originally from Wales, born in Wrexham and lived in Shotton. My father was pastor of the church there at the time and my mother a nurse. In 2005, we moved out to Bordeaux in South West France to join a student outreach initiative in partnership with UFM. My sister and I were 8 and 10 years old. I was baptised in 2010 having grown up knowing my salvation comes from Jesus but having not made my public declaration, or really taken my faith seriously until Revelation 21 hit me.

In 2014, having tried car mechanics and then retail, I felt called to some form of church ministry. This took the form of a gap year in a church in Swindon where I first came in contact with Youth for Christ. This is also where I started leading a youth group. I had the great joy of growing up through youth ministry with some incredible youth workers but had never taken the step into leadership.

Having completed my gap year, in 2015, I went on to study theology and worship at The London School Of Theology. I met my now wife Elizabeth and subsequently became the Head of Worship and Creative Arts, in early 2018, at the church I did my placement at. We married in September 2018 and began our adventure into the world of Christian ministry.

In 2020 we felt called out of London and back to my wife's home town of Norwich where we were welcomed into roles at Community Action Norwich. This is really where I found a love for communicating God's word to the unchurched kids of Lakenham.

This outreach work had been happening for well over a decade and I felt privileged to be able to carry it on. We saw amazing growth, in the youth work particularly. We grew our Thursday drop-in group from three to around 20. We communicated the gospel, and continue to, weekly.

I'm so excited about my new role here at Norwich Youth for Christ. Again building upon a foundation made up of decades of ministry and prayer. I have inherited an amazing team who have a wealth of experience. God is truly going to do amazing things through this work and I can't thank you enough for your past support.

I also ask that you join us in this new chapter as we look to the Lord for His guidance and the plans He has set in place for us at Norwich Youth for Christ. Please do pray for this transition, especially for the team as they now have to put up with my random singing and football chants.

# Cafe helped Norwich church re-invent itself

The closure of a Norwich city centre church for three years because of a huge crack in the chancel wall, led to it reinventing itself as a hub for a mission of hospitality, focused upon a very successful church café. **Keith Morris** reports.

In May 2009, on the day that incumbent Rev Madeline Light was due to be installed as priest-in-charge of St Stephen's, a large bang was heard in the church and the crack appeared, caused by a burst water main. The church was closed for three years, but today, 15 years later, the redeveloped church has become a hub for a mission of hospitality to the community, as the church engages with those around them in ways they could never have expected.

The church café is at the heart of that mission, hosting and financing the church's outreach ministries. In an era when many people have no contact with church, the café encourages the people of Norwich to come through the inviting big glass doors to eat, volunteer and take part in the life of the church.

At the time, the new Chapelfield shopping centre had recently opened near the church meaning that up to 10,000 people a day passed its doors – an opportunity which they recognised and used.

Curate Rev Ian Fifield said: "We had a beautiful medieval grade one listed building in the centre of Norwich. It would have been appalling stewardship to have it open on a Sunday only. Before the crack, when the shopping centre was being built and the churchyard developed, the church put hospitality and visibility at the heart of their plans starting with replacing the large oak west doors with glass, making it easier to see inside. It was their way of showing the community that they wanted the church to be open to them."

The congregation bought into the vision and gave generously and by 2012 the new purpose-built coffee centre was open for two hours daily.

When new café manager Beckie Ward arrived in 2014, she imagined a café that would be a place of grace in the community. Customers were invited to pay what they could afford for the food and drink on offer, so some paid less than the guide price and others paid more to be generous to their neighbours. It was billed as "Eat, drink, share, pay what you know is fair."

"It was something that God put on my heart," said Beckie. "I wanted to see the out-working of what grace could look like in a church café."

The Norwich community responded positively to a very different model of commerce in the city centre, with hundreds visiting regularly.



Beckie Ward, left, Rev Madeline Light and Clare Melia, outside St Stephen's Church. Picture by St Stephen's.

This was just the start and in 2019 the church aimed to help address loneliness through Café Friends – volunteers whose role is to engage with customers who would like to talk.

A small paid team manage between 20 and 30 volunteers, including people outside the church, prison leavers and the unemployed.

Amidst a fast-food culture, St Stephens Café has a distinctive commitment to slow,

wholesome food, with home-baked cakes, sausage rolls and soup among its most popular offerings.

"I think people appreciate that the café is not like Starbucks. You don't have to worry if you want to spend a couple of hours with a pot of tea – that is absolutely fine," said Ian.

Appointing community worker Clare Melia was another step in reaching out to

the deeper needs of its customers. She makes informal connections with people needing help with housing, addictions, debt and more. "When a need arose, as individuals came into the café, I knew who to call or where to signpost them," said Clare. Today she advocates for clients with statutory agencies and even in court and she has helped many café patrons find long-term housing.

The church is inspired in its entrepreneurial mission by the theology of John McGinley who argues that the church of tomorrow will be entrepreneurial in its culture, following where the Spirit of God leads.

The church believes that it is not just there for the benefit of its congregation but for those outside its walls as well – and the Gospel is at the heart of its mission.

Prison leavers charity Community Chaplaincy Norfolk is based in the café and its manager Mel Wheeler said: "We've had several clients who have become attenders on a Sunday. They know they are going to see some familiar faces and several tables are left in their café position during services to make people feel more at home."

There are many stories of café customers from the edge of the community who have become part of church life, people like homeless man 'Simon' who found help and friendship, then a place to live and joined an Alpha course.

Prayer and worship are everyday features of café life – and prayer is one of the most important ministries with those seeking hope in the café.

A booklet telling the story of the church and café and everything that has gone into making it such a success, has been written by Naomi Jacobs and Rev Madeline Light and recently published by Grove Books.

Madeline said: "This booklet represents years of work by so many people, including Rev Hereward Cooke who imagined the church as it is now in 2004, and a fund raising effort by Rev Pat Atkinson in the 1990s. Not to mention the people who have worked tirelessly in recent years. We seek to be a kingdom presence for the people around us, without pressure to join us."

"I am delighted that Naomi has helped us describe all that has happened so well. My hope is that people will see beyond the particular circumstances we found ourselves in and identify the particular kingdom principles that can encourage thriving."

"I look forward to seeing more churches valued for their positive contribution to society which in previous years has often been unseen and unnoticed."

The booklet is available to buy in St Stephen's for £3.50. It is also available online at Grove Books and Amazon.

[www.grovebooks.co.uk](http://www.grovebooks.co.uk)  
[www.ststephensnorwich.org](http://www.ststephensnorwich.org)

## Pirate radio rebel and now grime poet Paul

**Paul Wellings** is a Methodist dub poet now living in Sheringham who performs at festivals and whose latest album is getting played on national radio. He's hoping to play Glastonbury next year. **Tony Rothe** reports.



Paul Wellings performing at the Burston Festival in Norfolk.

■ Paul, who is also known as Anti-Social Worker, was born in the London overspill and raised in the East End. He was one of the original rebel pioneers of underground black music on the iconic LWR pirate radio station in the late 80s. He attended drama school in Islington, North London where several other famous performers have trained. He is also an acclaimed author, broadcaster, journalist and spoken word artist.

In 1985, Paul was lucky to land a prestigious freelance job in the music press with the New Musical Express (NME), and has interviewed hundreds of well-known musicians as well as activist Tony Benn and the notorious Reggie Kray.

Paul explains, "I'm Anti-Social Worker, a Methodist grime poet whose new album 'Militant Business & Grime Poetry' is getting played on Radio 1, 1Xtra and 6 Music. I've shared stages with John Cooper Clarke, Linton Kwesi Johnson and the late great poet Ben Zephaniah, who kindly called my album 'truly radical'."

"My faith impacts my work because my poetry is rooted in equality, social justice, community, diversity and inclusivity. I was christened at an early age and used to be a choirboy (an angel with a dirty face!) in the London Newtowns, but fell out of love with

religion for many years and called myself a born again atheist. But when I met my Jamaican wife about seven years ago, who is very religious, I found my faith again and have been attending a Methodist church in North Norfolk where they have been very accepting of my Christian Socialist beliefs."

"My faith is very important to me. I believe that Jesus was the most revolutionary figure in history, and was a compassionate social justice warrior."

"I see myself as a progressive Methodist and have links with trade unions, refugee councils, food banks and homeless shelters."

Paul's album is available on CD format exclusively from leading indie black music label m1music.com. You can see more of his work at;

<https://m1music.com/antisocialworker.html>

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## Church works with asylum seekers

■ **Continued from page 1.** has had experience over a number of years of working with asylum seekers, including hosting a joint social event over the summer in Eaton Park. However, Mark suggests: "I think the key thing is not whether we could speak their language or not, but whether they felt welcome and felt safe. And they've said to me they feel welcome; they keep on coming back."

Although Mark feels that the church's work with asylum seekers has been a learning curve, he also recognises that God had been preparing them in advance. "I'd done a thing with the carol services about Christmas traditions and how they speak of God, and so I'd had different flags. And at the beginning of 2020 I just had this sense, I need to buy a whole lot of flags. God told me to put up these flags, the flags from 200 countries which you will see in the church now. And then, two years later, we had our first asylum seekers come. And their flag, the Iranian flag is actually by the front door. And we've had other people from other countries now coming in, saying, 'we can see our flag!'"

Mark concludes that "we've made all kinds of mistakes, but God has used our inefficiency and our lack of knowledge and taken it and done something beautiful."

To find out more about their work with asylum seekers, contact Mark Elvin, [mark.elvin2@btinternet.com](mailto:mark.elvin2@btinternet.com)

## One Big Day

■ A 'One Big Day – Just One Thing' conference for anyone involved in ministry with children, young people and families is being hosted by the Children, Youth and Families Team at the Diocese of Norwich on Saturday April 27.

Through a programme of keynotes and seminars on thought-provoking topics, the conference will encourage delegates to consider 'Just one thing' - small and manageable ideas which can help their church start, enhance or grow their mission and ministry with young people and offer fruitful faith links between church, school and households.

Delegates will hear from Rev David Lloyd, Mission Development Officer for the Diocese of Norwich and Cheryl Govier from the Church of England's national Growing Faith Foundation.

The day is open to those from all church denominations and people are encouraged to come with their leaders and wider team where possible.

One Big Day takes place on Saturday April 27, 9am-4.30pm at Northgate High School, Dereham, NR19 2EU. The day costs £15 including breakfast and lunch (advanced booking required). For further information and booking please visit: [www.dofn.org/one-big-day](http://www.dofn.org/one-big-day)

# Hospital chaplain Mark brings peace and hope

**Mark Taylor** is a hospital chaplain based in Cromer, and sees part of his role as bringing Jesus into people's lives during times of pain and difficulty. **Tony Rothe** reports.

**M**ark originally trained to be a therapy radiographer, giving radiotherapy to patients living with cancer. It is whilst training for this that he came to faith in the Coventry Elim Pentecostal Church. Following an injury, he trained for Baptist ministry whilst at Sheringham Baptist Church, through Spurgeon's Bible College.

Having ministered at Sheringham, Wick, and finally ten happy years at Carleton Rode Baptist Church in South Norfolk, Mark felt called to the Chaplaincy at the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital Foundation Trust, which includes the Norfolk and Norwich hospital, Cromer Hospital, Norfolk Kidney Centre, and other admin sites around the city.

Mark says, "It seemed that God had called me to faith through training for a hospital vocation, and then through my ministerial formation, and those experiences prepared me to re-enter the hospital environment to care for people's spiritual needs."

"Chaplaincy really is a privileged position. I always think that when something wonderful happens in life we share that openly with people around us, but when the very difficult things happen we are quite selective of who we allow into those moments. My hope is that we continue to bring peace and hope when we come as invited guests into people's most challenging times."

Hospital chaplaincy in Norfolk has now rebranded as Spiritual Healthcare, and consists of a team of seven chaplains and a supporting group of volunteers, who are there to offer compassionate care and spiritual support to all – to be alongside people through life's experiences. Mark says the chaplains have no agenda or tick list, but aim to simply be present with patients, relatives, and staff to offer support through the ordinary and extraordinary times.

"As a team we care for people from cradle to grave; being there for families when their children are poorly or die, caring on the wards, available to A&E, being with patients at the end of their life to offer a final prayer and blessing, conducting funerals on behalf of the trust, and also conducting baptisms and emergency marriages (where someone may be approaching the end of their life)."

Another aspect of the work is to care for parents whose pregnancy results in loss. Once a patient reaches 13 weeks of gestation, then if that baby is lost chaplains are called to care for the family, to support them in their grief and then perhaps helping them plan for burial or cremation, and then taking them through to conducting the service. "We have many emotional links with these pre-



Mark Taylor. Picture by Helen Baldry.

cious parents," Mark said.

Mark is based at Cromer hospital, and his particular focus is with youngsters who have mental health issues which often manifest through self-harm, eating disorders, etc. He talks about the privilege of chaplaincy, supporting people during moments of pain and difficulty.

"Suddenly people want something bigger than themselves. We bring the presence of Jesus with us. I tell people 'Christ will stand with you and be faithful in these moments when you need him.'"

The chaplains are in the process of putting together a "RISE" pack for teens to engage with their feelings and emotions whilst they are in hospital, based on patients' suggestions and needs they identified. They are working with those patients to produce something which will hopefully be helpful to future patients. A postcard has been designed by a teen patient who had suffered a traumatic loss, and is for handing out to others who are struggling.

Mark went on to explain that he has been supporting a particular teenage patient who was in hospital for over eight weeks. "During

that time a relationship of trust was built up between her and me, and with her mum. It was a delight to see how simple sustained care and the offer of prayer strengthened and equipped this girl to cope with her overwhelming feelings and urges. Before she left hospital I was asked by her and her mum to baptise her. We did this on the paediatric ward with the nursing staff all there to support and encourage her."

Mark said that the chaplains would welcome prayers for their own mental/ emotional/ and spiritual wellbeing, as the emotional demands of the role can sometimes be difficult to sustain. As well as praying for the staff and patients, Mark asks for prayers that the chaplaincy would continue to be widely welcomed and trusted throughout the whole of the Trust.

"We hear what people are struggling with deep inside – not just physically. We get the opportunity to share scriptures and maybe to pray with them. And we will ask 'Can I bless you?' – very few people refuse a blessing! We do, of course, have the promise that as we draw near to God, God draws near to us."

# Pat's heart still in Indian slums

Blofield priest Rev Pat Atkinson has recently marked 40 years of local church ministry but she is better known for her work in India with slum children, cancer patients, lepers and street elders. **Keith Morris** reports.

**B**ack in 2006, Pat was awarded an MBE for her work and before that, in 1996, featured in Esther Rantzen's Hearts of Gold TV programme.

Now 76, Pat still takes a handful of services a month and says: "I love it at Blofield and don't want to give up yet."

But a large part of Pat's life and heart remain firmly in south India with the Vidiyal Trust charity.

"In Madurai in Tamil Nadu, where the main work is, we run a residential sheltered home for street elders, where we can accommodate 36 old ladies and men," she said. "In one specific slum we provide lunch for 52 ladies every day, most of them would not get a hot meal otherwise."

"Some 110 slum children come to our tuition centre morning and evening. There is no electricity, water or sanitation in the slum itself, but we have a generator."

"We do a lot of work with children with cancer from isolated village or city slums who otherwise could not even afford to get to the small local hospital, which often runs out of medication – which we try to source. When they recover we follow them back to their villages to support them."

"We still support a leprosy colony of 39 families with a monthly supplement bag and emotional and psychological support. Also a Saturday centre for the children who are not allowed to mix more widely."

The other part of the charity's work is in Mavelikara, in Kerala, where a children's home was built after the Indian Ocean tsunami at Christmas 2004. "It made sense at the time and it worked beautifully until the pandemic," said Pat. "But now there is less need for residential care and the pandemic put an end to the tuition classes. We now have a social worker setting up self-help groups. We don't need the building anymore and because we own it all legally we can re-use it in a proper way and the charity is currently in talks with the local Christian Martoma Church for them to take it over and use it as a home for 60 destitute elderly people."

Pat is very keen to remind churches or charities who purchase land or buildings for overseas projects to check on long-term ownership: "They will increase in value considerably over time, trusted staff may leave, but a person or group at some time will potentially have a valuable asset. Because we are a registered Trust in India as well as the UK we retain ownership of all of our assets so we can ensure that donations made will always be used for charitable benefit that we approve," she said.

"The work has been going on for 34 years now and we have done the best we possibly can with the resources we have and those funds have remained under contract and licenced to us and cannot be used in any other way."

Pat has never taken a salary for her work and always pays for her own trips to India which now number over 60, with help from family and friends.

Muthakumar, who visited Norfolk in December, is a former client of the charity and one of its biggest success stories. Today he is Pat's eyes and ears in India when she cannot be there and he manages all of the projects. He is among the literally hundreds of former sponsored children who today have university degrees and careers in engineering, IT, dress design and many other areas.

India today is very different from 34 years ago, says Pat: "There are no street children in India anymore. The government has clamped down so strictly now that there are no children on the streets. They are in school and either with a family or a government institution. There are slum children though."

"We are still looking after 250 people a day at the moment, whose lives are almost dependent on us to keep going on a day-to-day basis. Our work has saved hundreds of lives over the years."

"The two ambulances we ran for 16 years in Kerala, manged over 500k home visits for people with terminal cancer. But the hospital has now taken over that work."

Pat is hopeful of the future though and thinks that in maybe 15 years' time the need for such projects will be far less as the infrastructure of India develops at an incredible rate.

But problems remain: "The river in Madurai no longer has water in it," says Pat. "Water is brought in once a week by the Government and the drought is getting worse. It only rained for four days last year."

"It has been amazing and I have had the most fantastic time, but it has also been very hard. Until you have lain in a hospital with malaria or dysentery or spent hours on the streets, you don't really know the country. You need to be there amongst the people to understand what goes on."

"People know what our motivation is. We are not trying to proselytize but we have changed people's attitude towards Christians in Madurai. We are based on Matt 25 v 40, which says 'Whatever you do for one of the least of these brothers and sisters you do it for me.'"

[www.vidiyaltrust.org](http://www.vidiyaltrust.org)



Rev Pat Atkinson with Indian colleague Muthakumar in Norfolk recently.



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# Chance to meet East Anglia missionaries

Cambridgeshire couple Alex and Vatha Theobald plan to serve as missionaries in a landlocked country in east Asia from November 2024 with OMF International and you can meet them before they go or arrange a free mission-focused event at your church.

■ OMF is a global mission agency, established in the UK in 1865 by Hudson Taylor and has been creatively sharing the gospel to east Asia's unreached billions. In preparation for their service in Asia, the couple are currently studying at All Nations Christian College in Ware and are due to graduate in July. They are open to visiting and speaking at churches, events and small groups that would be interested in hearing about the ministry of unreached tribal groups. Vatha is currently the Under 30s Mission Mobiliser for the East of England at OMF. She is responsible for encouraging young people and children to become excited and engaged in world mission. In collaboration with local churches across the country, Vatha has led several kids work at regional conferences, music events, youth groups, Sunday school and mission days for young people. She also creates mission resources and can provide advice on exciting ways to teach mission in your church setting for every age group. The service is free of charge so if you'd like to arrange a mission focused event at your church then please do get in touch at [UK.U30Rep@omfmail.com](mailto:UK.U30Rep@omfmail.com) You can also meet them at NextGen young adults event in London on March 16, where they will be speaking about how global mission is still relevant for young people. The couple will also be leading a mission focused youth group during the morning service at Dereham Baptist Church (NR19 1BX) on April 28. [www.derehambaptist.org](http://www.derehambaptist.org) [www.nextgenevents.org/about](http://www.nextgenevents.org/about)

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# Centres offer a warm welcome and the chance to relax and to have fun

Christian conference, activity, holiday and retreat centres across Norfolk and North Suffolk are welcoming guests who are looking for something a little different.

The Horstead Centre activity centre, near Coltishall, is a well-established residential outdoor activity centre and retreat, with a strong affiliation to the Diocese of Norwich.

The centre offers affordable retreats, family stays, tailored activity days and residential adventurous breaks. "If you're planning a break for your family, church, or youth group in 2024, we would love for you consider a visit to us here at the Horstead Centre," said centre manager Will Mills.

"The Horstead Centre takes full advantage of its wonderful setting. The house and gardens nestle amongst woodland which stretches down to our new staithe on the River Bure. Just like Ratty and Mole you can spend some quality time together on the water, with laugh-out-loud enjoyment as you delight in building rafts, canoeing, or paddle-boarding.

"There are on-site activities too, including archery and caving, rock climbing and the zipline. Or you could try some of our new activities: orienteering, geocaching, and the Trebuchet Challenge.

"We believe that adventure with friends and family should be accessible and so the centre has kept prices as low as possible for families and groups. A stay here may be more affordable than you think. Please contact us to book or to explore options," said Will. [www.horsteadcentre.org.uk](http://www.horsteadcentre.org.uk)

■ All Hallows Guesthouse is tucked away in the centre of Norwich, next to and in partnership with St Julian's Church at the Shrine of Julian of Norwich. It offers guests a unique opportunity to find rest and refreshment where Lady Julian lived and wrote her Revelations of Divine Love over 650 years ago.

Equipped with seven comfortable bedrooms, spotlessly clean shared shower and toilet facilities and a state-of-the-art self-catering kitchen, this recently refurbished former convent is the ideal place for a quiet retreat in the heart of

the historic city of Norwich.

Guests are welcome to find a quiet spot in the house or chapel, make use of the restful study library space, or enjoy the cosy sitting room (with log fire in the winter months).

There is also a delightful garden and patio with private access to the walled churchyard next door.

Ideal for self-guided retreats, All Hallows is a haven of restful hospitality, managed with a passionately eco-friendly ethos.

Next door, St Julian's offers up to four daily services including morning and evening prayer and a daily Mass.

[www.allhallowsnorwich.co.uk](http://www.allhallowsnorwich.co.uk)

■ The Pleasaunce Christian Endeavour Holiday Centre, on the North Norfolk coast at Overstrand, just two miles from Cromer, provides quality accommodation and programmes including a range of activities, evening entertainment and times of prayer and worship.

Scenic surroundings and a warm welcome await holidaymakers at The Pleasaunce which is a unique, Grade Two\* listed mansion designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens for Lord and Lady Battersea between 1888 and 1902.

Visitors have included Queen Alexandra, her sister the Dowager Empress of Russia, Princess Louise and several British Prime Ministers.

Standing in six acres of grounds, The Pleasaunce can accommodate up to 80 visitors, making it perfect for large parties. Guests can relax in the tranquil rose or sunken gardens and enjoy the cloisters and clock tower.

Offering fun and recreation for people of all ages, the Pleasaunce is a mere 100 metres from the

cliffs, which overlook a popular sandy beach. Holidaymakers can choose to relax in the sea air, play a range of sports or take a walk along the coastal path.

The centre is in an ideal location for all holidaymakers, conferences, groups, school parties and retreats.

Facilities on site include a children's adventure playground, tennis court, croquet and a putting green, table tennis, pool and bowls. There is also free wi-fi.

To find out more, visit: [www.cehc.org.uk](http://www.cehc.org.uk)

■ Located on the Norfolk/Suffolk border on the edge of Bungay,

Quiet Waters is a Christian retreat house providing a friendly guest house experience for tired and weary Christians seeking a time of spiritual refreshment, those seeking God's direction or those simply wanting to spend time in His presence.

Chair of trustees, Paul Dunning, said: "We provide an opportunity for Christians to seek God in a quiet, peaceful and safe environment that allows freedom and space to experience God's love."

Quiet Waters is a large Georgian house nestled in two acres of grounds with its gardens going down to the River Waveney. There is comfortable accommodation for up to 14 guests in 8 bedrooms with two spacious living rooms, dining room (serving delicious home-cooked meals) and a Chapel. The accommodation includes

two ground floor bedrooms (with shared wet room) providing easy access.

Recent developments include a separate Creative Space, the 'log cabin' in the woods, equipped with resources for guests to use. It is ideal for individuals or small groups to explore various forms of creativity such as writing, composing, painting, worship and more.

"The mature gardens are a guest favourite consisting of varied landscapes, including a woodland walk, walled garden and natural meadow overlooking the river and open fields beyond. There is also a summerhouse from where our resident Kingfisher is occasionally

spotted. You will discover ample space to find peace and simply be.

"Our guests cherish the fellowship of chatting over meal times and the kitchen enjoys a five star food hygiene rating. From full-board to day visitor our guests are well fed with generous continental breakfasts, delicious home-cooked lunches and picnic suppers.

"The house is run by a team who live on site and are available to support guests through prayer, worship or simply by listening. We have daily times of reflection and worship to which guests are warmly welcome. As well as offering peace and quiet for the individual we are also ideal for day

groups of up to 20 people; perfect for those in church leadership seeking His direction," said Paul.

For more details, please explore the Quiet Waters website: [www.quietwaters.org.uk](http://www.quietwaters.org.uk)

■ Christian Conference Centre Letton Hall, located near Shipdam in mid-Norfolk, is fully open to groups, churches and families.

The centre has 73 beds in the main house, and nine in the Norfolk Wing. The nearby Stables has 54 beds, including two ten-bed dormitories and several three- or four-bed rooms.

Find out more on their website [www.lettonhall.org](http://www.lettonhall.org)

## The Pleasaunce, Overstrand, Norfolk

Scenic surroundings and a warm welcome awaits you. Standing in six acres of grounds, The Pleasaunce can accommodate up to 80 visitors, making it perfect for large parties. Guests can relax in the tranquil grounds and garden and are only a few minutes' walk from the beautiful North Norfolk coast.

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- ✓ Children's adventure playground
- ✓ Conference Facilities including free Wi-Fi
- ✓ Table Tennis, Pool Table, Indoor/Outdoor Bowls

The centre is an ideal location for all holidaymakers, conferences, groups, school parties and retreats. There is also a self-contained 2-bedroom bungalow and a 5-bedroom annex, both of which can sleep up to six people. Self-catering options are available in both the bungalow and annex.

Call our booking team on 01263 579212 or visit [www.cehc.org.uk](http://www.cehc.org.uk)

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# Graham speaks of bluetooth God

High-profile Norfolk entrepreneur and evangelist, **Graham Dacre**, returned to Norwich recently to tell his life story, some of the mistakes he has made and what he has learnt from them. **Keith Morris** reports.

Speaking to a 100-strong audience at the Norwich FGB Christmas dinner at the Mercure Hotel in Norwich on December 12, Graham said he has lived in Norfolk for 50 years before moving to London seven years ago, following a divorce.

On his way to becoming a phenomenally successful car dealer, Graham said his life was changed when church pastor Sedley Pimlott came into the garage he was working in to buy a car.

Graham was invited for a sauna bath at Sedley's home in Hainford, in an old railway carriage that he had converted. "My life was totally and utterly transformed by the power of God," said Graham. "Salvation dealt with my past, gave me a purpose and gives me a hope for tomorrow."

But in 2017, life went wrong for Graham: "Seven years ago my life was taken apart by a divorce I never saw coming and I had to leave town. I packed two suitcases and left for London. While I did



Graham Dacre. Picture courtesy of the Philo Trust.

not instigate it I was undoubtedly the reason for it and I regret that.

"Sadly, as is often the case, it has affected family relationships and even today the heartache and the sadness is

on-going. Sometimes life does take us apart, but Christ can put us back together again."

Graham moved to London not knowing anybody: "It has taken time to establish a new life and a more positive outlook. I was 71 last year and had a really good look at myself and dug into my soul and I learnt some things that I wish I had learnt earlier in life.

"In past times I used to clip my emotions so that I never went up and never went down. it may be a male thing to do. I would never admit to vulnerability.

"I would rarely share my feelings and I did not realise that I needed to be aware of the feelings of others, because I always made decisions in my head rather than in my heart.

"In the book of James it says: 'confess your faults to one another that you may be healed'. Now I am far more willing to admit to my faults," said Graham. "Today I am willing to learn from my emotions rather than packing them away and saying I don't have any.

"I have learnt that my God is faithful and he still loves me despite my sins and faults. He not only loves me but he also forgives me.

"When I left Norwich, I thought how can I ever again preach in a church or lead people to Christ? But I do still do that and it is my joy," said Graham.

Talking about a contemporary God, Graham explained: "In times past I did not know that when God created me he placed a mobile phone in my heart. And I did not know that to activate it I needed a service provider. Some years ago, Jesus became my service provider and gave me access to God the Father. A relationship is available to all who download the Jesus App but just like any other App you first have to accept the terms and conditions. Some people don't want to do that.

"In my relationship with Jesus I now

enjoy Bluetooth access to God the Father.

"Reading the Bible charges my mobile phone as does talking to others about my Christian faith. It also gets charged up when I go to church or pray. God operates the largest mobile phone network in the entire galaxy. Not only can I talk to Him but He also talks to me through His Holy Spirit," said Graham.

Extending the analogy, Graham said: "God understands every language and dialect. He answers every call immediately and simultaneously. Calls and data are free and you don't get any roaming charges either.

"He has a five-star customer satisfaction rating, his customer services department is open 24/7, including Christmas and you can get his number direct from Jesus," he said.

"I am not religious, I cannot stand religion, said Graham. "Religion is what man made out of Christianity. I do relationships, as does Jesus. You must let hope not hurt shape your future. My hope comes from knowing Jesus, the creator God."

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