



# The Way



The FREE newspaper of the Church in Cumbria – Winter 2020/21



County unites for  
the Big Carol Sing

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Huge local effort to  
sustain Foodbank

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## A LIGHT IN DARK TIMES

As Christmas is celebrated amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, so you are encouraged to hold the prayer below in your hearts...

*Creator God, who spoke amid the chaos  
to say, 'Let there be light',  
and who sent your Son to be  
'The Light of the World',  
help us this Christmas to know your light in our lives.  
As we welcome the baby Jesus into  
our dark and suffering world  
we ask for your Spirit's gift of peace  
in our hearts, our homes and our communities.  
May we know your light within us,  
that your compassion might be felt  
by all who are anxious, worried or in any need.  
Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,  
in the power of your Holy name  
we give thanks for your light which still shines brightly  
and leads us in hope into the coming year. Amen*

Head chorister Jonty Hansford inside Carlisle Cathedral  
DAVE HOLLINS



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The purpose of *The Way* is to reflect the Church in Cumbria to itself and to our communities more widely.

We do not seek to promote any particular theological viewpoint, but rather aim to stimulate debate by featuring writers from a variety of church traditions and from society more widely.

While we are happy to consider unsolicited submissions, we operate largely on a system of commissions and do not guarantee to publish any materials received.

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**The Way**  
Newspaper of  
the Church  
in Cumbria

# Challenging times

Welcome to this special edition of *The Way*. This issue of the newspaper is shorter than usual and will only appear online, but we felt it important to mark how churches, organisations, families and individuals have risen to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. As we begin with messages from the leaders of our covenanted partner denominations, may we also take this opportunity to wish you a very safe and happy Christmas, and renewed blessings for 2021.

## The Rt Rev James Newcome, Bishop of Carlisle



ONE of the biggest challenges facing all our churches over the last nine months has been pastoral. In our congregations and communities, there has been illness, bereavement, anxiety, stress, uncertainty and loneliness at unprecedented levels - and I have been impressed by the engagement we have witnessed as church members have reached out in practical ways to those most vulnerable. This has included foodbanks, visiting and shopping, and has been a great example of faith in action.

Equally demanding has been the huge challenge posed to worship. Christianity is an incarnational faith, and meeting together to worship God is an essential part of our discipleship. Once again, our churches have

responded magnificently and creatively with a variety of online and streamed services, many of them produced ecumenically in our mission communities. These have frequently attracted new adherents, but I think everyone agrees that face-to-face contact remains an ideal. Most of us have missed that hugely during periods of lockdown.

A third challenge has been to our faith as we have struggled

with big questions such as 'Where is God in all this?' One of the best theoretical contributions to that has come in Tom Wright's little book *God and the Pandemic*. Even more inspirational has been the resilience, hope and perseverance I have witnessed in Christians across the county. God is at work and will bring something good out of what, for most people, is still a tragedy.

Then, of course, there have been financial challenges to the Church as a result of Covid-19. I have talked about these elsewhere. As for so many organisations and individuals, they are ongoing. As with the other challenges, I want to pay tribute to the sacrifice and generosity that has typified the reaction of many of our churches and mission communities.

Finally, with all of these challenges, I would acknowledge the importance of lament as a vital part of our response.

## Major Roger Batt, Salvation Army Divisional Commander

AS WE enter the season of Advent, maybe as a result of what this year has held for us, more than ever I sense we can understand what it means to wait in hope on Jesus.

As I think about that, I find myself reflecting on what John writes of Jesus in John 1:14, quoting from The Message paraphrase: "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood." In simple terms, that says to me that Jesus has come close to us; he has come alongside us as our companion on the way of life.

In many ways this has been a year of restrictions and restraints for the Church, but because of the hope we have in Jesus I also see that it has been a year where in readiness we have moved into our neighbourhoods in more intentional ways. I see that we have come close to people through offering prayer and words of hope and we have also become companions as we have been engaged in small acts of loving kindness with people. Let us forever stay close to Jesus and allow him to be our hope and companion on the way.



## Andrew Dodd, President, Churches Together In Cumbria

'SO MAKE yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out.' Genesis 6 v14

Noah's Ark is pictured mostly as a wooden 'craft' created by skilled carpentry. Images and models show beautifully clean cypress wood and 'ship-shape' construction. Children's toys and pictures universally show smiling animals and people aboard, safe, saved and clean.

This, however, is not how the ark was designed by God.

I imagine the 'pitch' was a form of water-proofing tar. Dug from pits, it would have been a back-breaking, smelly and dirty business to source and then coat the boat inside and out. All that lovely cedar covered by unattractive black stuff! Perhaps we can learn from the less romanticised and biblical image in these times.

The Churches Together logo is also a boat, a cross on the deck and radiant lines above it.

Living as God's people in tragic, fearful times, can we work together, sharing God's creative 'gifts' in our communities? Coating the leak-prone 'nice' has poor visual outcomes, but to do so provides a place of hope and salvation. The promise of the rainbow awaits.



## The Rev Dr James Tebbutt, Chair of the Cumbria District of the Methodist Church

ALL of us have been dis-oriented in these last months. For some, the experience will have been even more difficult, through illness, loss of a loved one or disruption to livelihood. I am wary of being trite but want you to know that so many of us, whether known or unknown, will be thinking of you, feeling for you and holding you before the God who does not abandon but who in Jesus Christ entered into darkness.

During the year, when I witnessed neighbours and volunteers, officials and agencies, teachers and churches pulling together, I thought, at least for a moment, selfishness has died, and care and harmony are possible. There is always hope, so why does it take a pandemic to wake us from our stupor to realise how selfish things so often are, and how misdirected we can be in our priorities? What changes of goodness and grace can work in us to recapture the essentials for our churches and society, enabling light to be reflected in and through us to help diminish the darkness?

This Christmas, may you be reminded in your prayers and experience, and in the care you give and receive, of the God whose light brings life and love for yourselves and others, to banish the darkness, and to bring relief, safety and blessing for all.





# Doorstep voices unite

■ Organisers hope for big turnout for BBC Radio Cumbria's carol sing-along



'Keeping hope alive': Radio presenter Richard Corrie, right, with Andy Fearon, from Carlisle's Vineyard Church  
DAVE ROBERTS

CHURCHES across Cumbria are being encouraged to join in with and promote the county's biggest socially distanced Christmas carol sing-along.

On Sunday December 20, from 6pm, a special programme will be broadcast by BBC Radio Cumbria during which the whole county will be invited to take to their doorsteps to sing *Silent Night* at 6.15pm.

The BBC's Richard Corrie, who will present the show, said: "This is a wonderful opportunity for the whole county to come together in song and to help lift the mood for everyone after what has been an unprecedented year due to the coronavirus.

"My hope is that as many people as possible will tune into the programme that night and will sing their hearts out from their doorsteps. We'd encourage all our listeners to let their family, friends and neighbours know so as many people as possible can join in."

Cumbria's Big Carol Sing follows similar successful events run by the radio station, including Dance on Your Doorstep during the first lockdown.

Eleanor Ledesma, Director of Big Reach and Digi-Evangelism in the Diocese of Carlisle's God for All team, is helping oversee arrangements.

She said: "This is not just about churches coming together to sing the carol; it's about everybody in Cumbria raising their voices for some much-needed festive cheer. It's wonderful to think thousands of people could unite in song, and feel the hope that is alive to us all through the birth of Jesus and his transformative love."

An advert is being broadcast on

By Dave Roberts

commercial radio stations throughout December to promote the event, and resources are being shared across social media platforms and websites.

The resources include downloadable invitations which people can share as well as the lyrics to *Silent Night* and other carols that will feature on the BBC Radio Cumbria show.

The countywide Big Carol Sing has won the support of Andy Fearon, from Carlisle's Vineyard Church. He said: "We just wanted to help keep hope alive during this time and had already developed our own plans for this kind of event across Carlisle. So we were more than happy to join alongside Cumbria's Big Carol Sing."

Meanwhile, a virtual choir has recorded a version of *Silent Night* for the event. The idea came from the Rev Alison Riley, Network Youth Church Leader in Calder Deanery. In total, 34 people recorded themselves in their homes after Alison provided a backing track.

Carol singers will be encouraged to share selfies and videos of their rendition of *Silent Night* on various social media channels under the hashtag #cumbriasbigcarolsing.

You can listen to the special programme on BBC Radio Cumbria from 6pm on Sunday December 20 by tuning into the FM frequencies: North, East and West 95.6 FM, South 96.1 FM, Whitehaven and Keswick 104.1 FM, Kendal 95.2 FM, Windermere 104.2 FM. Alternatively, listen live via the BBC Sounds app.

■ For details, visit [www.godforall.org.uk/cumbria-big-carol-sing/](http://www.godforall.org.uk/cumbria-big-carol-sing/)



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## Four themes give sense of direction



The Rev Graeme Skinner, left, leader of the Eden Wild Goose Mission Community in the north of the county, gives a personal account as to how the vision refresh can work locally.

I LOVE the four themes – follow daily, speak boldly, care deeply and tread gently – they capture something of the heart

of the gospel. I think it's great that they have come about from such a long consultation, across so many churches. We all own it because we all contributed to it.

Earlier in the year we started, as churches, to talk about a vision. At the same time, we had also contributed towards the ecumenical vision. So, when details of the vision refresh came back, as a PCC, we recognised these are the words we could use anyway. Ultimately, it's the heart that matters, but the words have to be memorable and give a sense of direction.

I keep using the four themes in a regular letter which goes out from the church. Our PCC always has an agenda item 'What is God up to now?' and these themes are inspiring our discussion.

They're also reflected in our wider mission community which is a real mix of church and community people. I can use words like 'speak boldly' and 'follow daily' and they don't send people away. In fact, people may ask, 'What does that mean?' and I can explain that for us to follow daily is to follow Jesus.

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# Partners approve refreshed vision

■ Positive responses to Covid-19 pandemic feed into process



**Challenge:** The Rt Rev Dr Emma Ineson has been overseeing the vision refresh

JENNY WOOLGAR

By Dave Roberts

THE Bishop of Penrith gives a little laugh when asked what it's been like to oversee a vision refresh during a global pandemic.

Nearly five years after the ecumenical God for All vision was launched, there was a mutual agreement among all partner denominations that the time had come to prayerfully consider and reflect on the continued growth of mission and ministry in Cumbria.

Work was well on with that, discerning feedback from a series of consultations across the county. Then Covid-19 struck.

The Rt Rev Dr Emma Ineson believes the pandemic, despite being something none of us would ever welcome, has indeed created new opportunities and fresh ways of being and doing church, which can be fed into the vision refresh process.

Bishop Emma explains: "It has been a difficult time for everyone. Despite that we have known God's presence with us, and one of the ways I've seen that is through the countywide tremendous engagement with the

Living Lord,  
as we offer to you our common life,  
refresh our vision  
that we may know your will  
and seek to follow in all your ways.  
May we **follow daily** as your disciples,  
**care deeply** for one another in  
community,  
**speak boldly** your gospel words of love,  
and **tread gently** as faithful stewards of  
your goodness.  
We ask this in the power of your holy  
name,  
as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer  
of our lives,  
today and for ever.  
Amen

vision refresh process – even though much of it has been online and virtually."

Launched in May of last year with 100 days of prayer and then 100 days of listening, the vision refresh has seen countywide engagement and consultation at many levels.

The feedback received has shaped a vision to 'release the whole people of God for the whole mission of God for the transformation of Cumbria in the

name of Jesus', with the creation of four focal themes: follow daily, speak boldly, care deeply and tread gently. Allied to that will be a Rule of Life which people will be invited to follow as they live out their faith.

In October, all four covenanted partner denominations formally approved the refreshed vision, and this will be launched in 2021.

Meanwhile, four groups have been formed, given the job of considering what should be the missional focus for each of the main themes.

Bishop Emma adds: "We're in discussions about the resources that will be needed to equip individuals and church communities to live out the vision right across the county.

"But essentially we want to empower people locally so that they feel enabled to move forward with the refreshed vision and to continue to grow God's Kingdom here in Cumbria.

"I'm truly excited and, at the same time, humbled by the way God has blessed us with a renewed sense of vision for the coming years. I'd ask everyone to continue to hold the work involved with the vision refresh in their prayers."



# Charity saw 280 per cent spike in demand in few weeks after first lockdown

# Volunteers and food donors

# 'rally round' for Foodbank

By Dave Roberts

"WE'VE had people visit our drop-in centre who are really suffering. Normally, we'd put our arm around them, get them a brew and have a nice chat, but because of the coronavirus we've not been able to do that. It's been really hard."

Claire Coulthurst, project manager of the Barrow Foodbank, explains some of the emotional challenges which she and her team of volunteers have faced during the pandemic.

Formed in 2012 through a collaboration of local churches and community groups, the Foodbank offers support for those people who need help.

Last year it served 7,380 people, 2,991 of whom were children. More than 160 local organisations refer people to the Foodbank. They receive a voucher, through which they are given food for their household for three days. Generally, clients can have three vouchers during a six-month period.

After Covid first struck, there was a huge spike in demand.

"There was a 280 per cent increase in demand in the first few weeks after the lockdown," Claire says. "We were absolutely manic. That was also coupled with the fact that we lost about 20 per cent of our volunteers who had to shield."

"However, we were supported



by a lot of people who had been furloughed and who offered to come in and help. Some of them have stayed on with us.

"We were experiencing the demand we'd normally see around Christmas time – which is normally our busiest time – and we ate into quite a lot of our stock."

National support from supermarket chain Tesco saw 15 tonnes of food delivered to the organisation, which operates out of Abbey Road Baptist church in Barrow.

That was coupled with fantastic local support which helped to replenish stocks.

Claire adds: "Donations from the public have not stopped coming in; right the way through the pandemic. All the permanent collection points in supermarkets are always full and sometimes we've had to go back for a second collection. We're so lucky to have such an amazing support network in Barrow, and in Ulverston and Millom, where our two satellite centres are based."

The Foodbank currently opens five days a week to enable people to drop in, with all staff and volunteers working in socially distanced ways. Clients can also telephone the centre to book deliveries which are made three days a week.

Jim Webster, the Foodbank's chair of trustees, recognises the continued support which is offered by local people.

He adds: "When lockdown first happened and a lot of our volunteers had to self-isolate, as they



**Vital aid:** Above and left, Foodbank volunteers sort through donations

REV ROBIN HAM

were over a certain age, people rallied around from across the town. People came forward with offers of help.

"The support has been absolutely phenomenal, not just for the local hubs that were set up to help but also for the Foodbank. As a result, we are probably going into Christmas with more stock than we'd normally have, though we will need it."

■ For further details, visit [www.barrow.foodbank.org.uk](http://www.barrow.foodbank.org.uk)

## Baby group success

AS LOCKDOWN restrictions were eased, organisers of a baby spiritual nurture group in Penrith advertised new sessions. Within 12 hours it was full, demonstrating the need for such support networks, especially during the pandemic.

Run by Sarah Hulme and Chenda Nuttall, the group has met weekly at Penrith Methodist Church. The aim is to gather new parents together and explore and share elements of Christian faith through multi-sensory sessions with new babies.

Sarah explained: "I'm always impressed by the level of sharing, honesty and openness that soon develops within such a community. The implications of experiencing lockdown with a newborn baby definitely unite a group at a deep level."

After meeting for an initial six weeks, group members unanimously requested it continue.

It is one of a number of spiritual baby groups to have been created at locations across the county, including Barrow, Ulverston and Kendal.



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'An extraordinary time': Pupils at Shap CE School enjoying lessons outdoors, left and centre, and in a normal classroom setting

# Teachers join pupils on steepest learning curve

■ How are the 104 church schools within the diocese coping with the pandemic?

THE enormity of the impending coronavirus pandemic hit Vanessa O'Dea during a school trip to London.

The Diocese of Carlisle's Director of Education recalls how she'd consciously avoided holding onto passenger straps on an underground train for fear of transmission risk.

On the journey back north – following a wonderful day helping chaperone pupils from the Good Shepherd Multi Academy Trust on a trip to the Houses of Parliament – she remembers wondering when a similar trip would take place again.

A few weeks later, the UK was in lockdown and many schools and colleges were closed, though some remained open for vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers.



**'Blown away':**  
Vanessa O'Dea

Vanessa says: "I was relatively new to the post and was still trying to get my head around all manner of day-to-day things. To say this was a challenge is an understatement. However, I understood that this was a new experience for us all."

With 104 church schools within the Diocesan Board of Education, Vanessa and her team began to contact as many headteachers as possible.

While the local authority retained oversight of the logistics around school closures, there was understanding of the need for pastoral support to be offered up.

"We began to consider what the leaders of our schools would need during this time," Vanessa adds. "We quickly realised they needed each other so we set up 'head-teacher huddles' through which

By Dave Roberts

they could come together online.

"We learned how to use Zoom and let them know they could meet up twice a week. We would also change times so different people could join at different times. This was a space in which heads felt safe to be vulnerable or even angry."

The 'huddles' have continued throughout the pandemic, with headteachers also receiving weekly 'huddle notes' to keep them updated on the latest issues.

Meanwhile, an existing peer support group set up for governors has proved beneficial.

Vanessa explains: "Because of the impact of the pandemic on peoples' lives we've seen a drop-off in the numbers of governors. We currently have 60 vacancies when typically that would be around 30 to 40."

"That increase in resignations is a concern but the governor peer support network has been running since January and we're looking to use that as much as possible."

Vanessa is full of admiration for the way headteachers, staff, children, parents and governors have coped since March.

In some instances, schools organised food deliveries to vulnerable families during lockdown, while teachers also delivered learning packs to homes.

Vanessa cites filmed and written messages of support sent from both the Bishop of Carlisle and Bishop of Penrith to staff and pupils in church schools across the county as real morale boosters.

"I'm blown away by the way our teachers, teaching assistants, school workers, pupils and parents have all responded," she concludes.

"People need to know just how much our teachers have done, which is in addition to the learning that they provide. They've been brilliant."

## TAKING IT ONE DAY AT A TIME



**'No cross-over':** The pupils at Shap CE School are taught in four bubbles

Katie Chappell, pictured right, is acting headteacher of Shap CE School, which has 94 pupils, ranging from nursery to Year 6. Here she offers an insight into the challenges faced during the Covid-19 pandemic...



TO BE honest, it's been surreal. We've had to take one day at a time. In March we were faced with closing down the school but also having to think about the future for the children and how we could continue to educate them remotely.

We've come so far in such a short time. Initially we didn't have emails established for all of our pupils, so we had to put that system in place to allow us to communicate directly with the children. At the same time we had

to think about members of staff who could be classed as clinically vulnerable and how to deploy everyone.

We know our families very well so we understood that there would be some who would not have all the technology they would need for home learning. We had to work out what would work best for them; a lot of that was through emailing packs for learning. We also had to put in extra support for our vulnerable children.

We were able to partially re-open school in June with two bubbles which eased us in a little bit. But it's been an extraordinary

time. We've felt like we've been sprinting a marathon to keep up with all the paperwork.

In September we created four bubbles. We have two different start and finish times, four different access points and four sittings for lunch, and our play times are all scheduled to the minute so there's no cross-over of bubbles.

The staff have been awesome throughout. It's a brilliant team. During lockdown some staff focussed on the children, some went into our hub - Brunswick School - and some helped the Salvation Army deliver food parcels for our children and our cluster of schools.

Our children value being back at school and have adapted to all the rules. They and their families have responded so well.



■ Churches make the most of video conferencing and other technology during lockdowns

# Worshippers, mourners and wedding guests all Zoom in

By Dave Roberts

IT MAY come as no surprise to Zoom users that, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the use of the words 'mute' and 'unmute' has increased by 300 per cent this year.

The video conferencing platform is just one of a number which congregations and clergy have had to embrace as they look at new ways of being and doing church.

Early in the pandemic – and with church buildings closed to public worship – many began to explore how best to use Zoom, YouTube, Facebook and other platforms for weekly services, Bible study groups and church meetings.

The Rev Simon Bickersteth, vicar at St James' in Denton Holme, Carlisle, pre-recorded many of his services which were then uploaded to YouTube; and his church has just started to livestream morning services from the church building on Facebook as well as Zoom.

He said: "On Christmas Day we will do a half-hour family Zoom worship rather than try to do an all-age service in church. Most of our material has been pre-recorded which, in technical terms, generally means better quality, and you have greater control over the content."

"Where pre-recorded content possibly fails is that you don't have that sense of connection with people and it's more difficult to sense how people are engaging."

"I was used to messing around with cameras and technology and there have been advantages – each week we hold a prayer course online and someone from Chicago is able to join us."

With a restriction on the numbers of people who can attend weddings and funerals, digital technology has again come to the fore.

Jordan Summers, a member of Penrith Methodist Church, runs 1Five Events and Film. He has livestreamed around 20 funeral services during the pandemic.

One was his grandfather's, which meant his father and brother were able to join the service from their home in Abu Dhabi.

He explained: "By livestreaming my grandad's funeral it really made me appreciate how important it is to give as many people as possible opportunity to attend the service. I know how much it meant to my dad and brother."

"We work closely with funeral directors, the families and clergy to



Digital platforms: Various groups have had to find new ways of being and doing church



Jordan Summers: Livestream

make sure there's no intrusion. There are times, because of poor internet connectivity, when we have to record the services and then make them available, but generally we are able to livestream them on YouTube via a secure link."

Jordan also ran three livestreams of the Anglican ordination services at Carlisle Cathedral in September. The cathedral now regularly livestreams services and this will continue on December 23 and Christmas Eve – with a crib services and two carol services each day – as well as the Midnight Eucharist and the Christmas Day morning service.

The Dean of Carlisle, the Very Rev Mark Boyling, said: "Normally, the cathedral would be

very busy for these services but obviously we are restricted as to numbers this year.

"For us it made absolute sense to livestream and our prayer is that more people than ever are able to join us virtually."

Other groups have consciously looked at the language they are using when connecting digitally.

Mountain Pilgrims is a community seeking to re-imagine the mountain experience. They meet outdoors to "discover the 'thin places' where the spirit soars and we are lifted out of the everyday".

The first lockdown temporarily put paid to their face-to-face gatherings, meaning people were now connecting via screens and Facebook.

Richard Passmore, Director of Mission Innovation and Fresh Expressions in the God for All team, said: "We took the cell church model which is based around welcome, worship, word and witness and frames how to do church in small groups."

"We changed those to car park, compass points, food for thought and mountain rescue; language the community recognised."

"It definitely worked for our group; everyone can connect with that feeling when you're in a car park, waiting for others to arrive before a walk."

Alex Haynes  
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# Role of chaplaincy team has changed during Covid

■ In our latest Focus on Faith, we talk to the Rev Barrie Thomas, who is the lead chaplain for the NHS's North Cumbria Integrated Care Trust

**Q** Please tell us a little bit about yourself.

**A** I was born in Carlisle and raised in Brampton within a Christian family. I made a firm commitment to follow Christ aged eight, but typically went through rebellious teenage years.

I was raised as a Methodist, but when I married I moved into Carlisle and joined the Church of the Nazarene which became my home church. After 25 years in business life – ending up as a senior director in the Eddie Stobart Group – God suddenly called me into ministry.

I spent the next 22 years in Raffles in Carlisle, helping to regenerate the area and restore values. At the request of the community, I planted a church. In that time, while still heavily involved in running the charity, I was also asked to take on the pastorate of a sister church in the city, a post I held for eight years. Eventually though, I realised I'd taken that church as far as I could, so I stepped back into my charity role in Raffles. Rather than replant another church, I was invited to join the ministry team at the local Anglican church, St Barnabas. This involved a full transition into Anglican ordination.

Much of my life has been unplanned. In ministry, I saw myself as an accidental church planter; it wasn't my idea, it was at the request of the people of Raffles and the directing of God. In the same way, I now class myself as an accidental chaplain. I only came on board to help the previous lead chaplain but soon found that I loved the work and that God had opened up the way for a new phase of my life.

**Q** What does your role as lead chaplain involve?

**A** Nothing is wasted in life, God sees to that, and this role in the hospital draws on my past experiences of business and management – a lot of my work is administrative in nature. While it often takes me away from the pit face, where I love to be, these are essential aspects of the work and, as I'm here all the time, I tend to be on hand to deal with the crises.



**Barrie Thomas:** 'People know there's something beyond what they are experiencing today'

DAVE ROBERTS

There are 14 of us in the chaplaincy team across the north of Cumbria. The majority are 'bank' chaplains (sessional), but during Covid their hours have increased. We have also established a pastoral care table in the hospital's atrium. This is staffed by volunteers, although a bank chaplain is also there from 6 to 8pm to provide support for staff as they leave after a long and stressful shift.

Assisting those coming to the end of life remains an important part of what we do, as does supporting relatives through the grieving process, but our role has been greatly extended during the pandemic.

**Q** How important is it to have a chaplaincy team in the hospital?

**A** It's critical. It gives a real sense of reassurance to people and a recognition that there is something beyond that which is currently seen. It gives people a sense of peace.

Medical staff tell us they know when we've been some-

where because there's a different feel in the room, a sense of God's presence and peace.

If a person has faith, then you take that and help them to come to terms with that. Of course, we can't force that; it has to come through a conversation in which people ask to explore. If a person states they have no faith in anything beyond, we still meet with them to assist them recognise the spiritual value of their own well-being and help them come to terms with their parting from this life and what they would wish to pass on to their families. We openly state we are here for those of faith or no faith. Our role is still relevant, and, not infrequently, no faith turns into faith.

**Q** What particular challenges have you faced during the pandemic?

**A** Our ward volunteers, who are our eyes and ears, were stood down and not able to do the rounds. They'd normally go into wards every

day, chatting to people, identifying their needs and highlighting to us any issues to follow up. Initially, we also couldn't go onto the wards which was a devastating blow, but soon we were able to return, not just for end of life but also when a patient requested a visit. We don't have the same access as before because, understandably, staff don't want extra people around the wards but we have as much access as we need. We have the privilege of also spending a lot of time with staff now – it feels like there's been a transition in the role.

**Q** What signs of hope have you seen during this time?

**A** I feel there is a greater awareness of God. At least 350 Bibles provided by the Gideons have been taken from our pastoral care table. This is not through us going and giving; it is by people, including staff, coming and taking. It's their decision, their need. People have also taken

the little crocheted crosses provided by the Mothers' Union. Five or six hundred have been taken, not just by patients or relatives but again by nurses. People know there's something beyond what they are experiencing today.

In addition to our prayer partner network, at the request of staff, we also now have a weekly staff prayer meeting. We believe God is moving and opening the way for us to follow.

**Q** What would be your prayer for the hospital chaplaincy team?

**A** God has protected the team throughout Covid; not one team member has been ill with it from being present in the hospital. I covet his continued protection. I'd pray for continued open doors for chaplaincy. My prayers are also with the patients and relatives at such a difficult time. And we also uphold all the staff too who are often exhausted when they finish their shifts.