

# The Way



The FREE newspaper of the Church in Cumbria – Spring 2024



**Musicians delight  
in church venues**

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**Lakeland space for  
encounter with God**

PAGE 10

A large photograph of Gareth Browning, a man with glasses and a mustache, wearing a bright green zip-up jacket with the 'Forestry England' logo on the chest. He is sitting outdoors in a wooded area with trees in the background.

# TREAD GENTLY

■ Faith and forestry go hand in hand for MBE recipient Gareth

“I HAVE a complete sense of awe as to what God has done in creating nature. I’ve learned to let nature do its thing; as Christians we need to allow the same for the Holy Spirit.”

Meet forester Gareth Browning who, in this edition of The Way, reflects on his life’s passion - working with nature to benefit our landscape.

His Christian faith undergirds all he does as a forester in north Cumbria and his work to help re-wild Ennerdale, boosting the number and variety of species which now call it home.

On page 8 we hear more from Gareth who has also been awarded an MBE in recognition of his commitment to forestry and nature recovery.

And he explains why it’s important we should all ‘Tread Gently’, one of the key themes of our ecumenical county’s God for All vision and strategy.



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*The Way* is the newspaper of the Church in Cumbria. It is produced in partnership between the Church of England Diocese of Carlisle, the Methodist District of Cumbria, the United Reformed Church in Cumbria and Churches Together in Cumbria. Through Churches Together in Cumbria, we ensure coverage of and distribution to the Roman Catholic, Salvation Army, Quakers and independent churches. The editorial team is made up of representatives from across the denominations.

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.

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

# CARE DEEPLY

In the third part of our series focusing on the four themes of our ecumenical God for All vision and strategy, in this edition of *The Way* we reflect upon 'Care Deeply'. Our ecumenical leaders consider what this means as we live out our Christian lives - listening to our local communities, responding in loving service, seeking to transform injustice, challenging oppression and pursuing peace and reconciliation.



**The Rt Rev Rob Saner-Haigh,  
Bishop of Penrith**

THE idea of the 'common good' is something we don't hear about so much any longer. It's the sense in which we are tied together in community, united by our common humanity, and somehow have the care and responsibility for the flourishing of one another because each is made in the image of God.

It's a deeply Christian idea, which the church has reflected on, encouraged and worked for over many generations, from the earliest days of the church caring for those whom Roman society had cast out through to the foundation of hospitals, schools and even our justice system and the welfare state.

It is the sense in which if I have too much, whilst my neighbour has too little, if society serves my needs more

than it serves others, all of us are, in fact, poorer - both physically and spiritually. It is a commitment to making decisions, using resources, applying our time and gifts, so that all can flourish and benefit from the goodness of God's creation.

Whilst 'caring deeply' obviously includes the church's pastoral care, it is also fundamentally about our responsibility, our vocation, to seek the 'common good'. It is about our responsibility to use our time and resources to work for those things, and to seek those structures in our community which lead to the flourishing of all. It is us seeking the kingdom of God, the shalom, the wholeness and joy of God's peace, in God's world and those places where He has placed us.

**Major David Taylor,  
Salvation Army  
Divisional Commander**



THE Easter story never ceases to amaze, inspire and challenge us. It gives us profound vision of the extent of God's compassionate will to reconcile, restore and redeem us. It gives hope of a coming kingdom full of justice, righteousness and truth, where what God wants done is done.

The apostle Paul often employs the direct word play that God's grace (charis) calls for our thanksgiving (eucharistia), like an echo that reverberates back to God - "that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God" (2Cor.4:15).

When Paul explains what he means by giving thanks, he says it is in everything we are, we say and we do. Our 'good news' gospel is at heart very simple; to allow God's grace, in and for us, to overflow and echo back to God and to the people that God loves.

Because God is compassionate and cares deeply about our lives - as Jesus' life, death and resurrection makes clear - we should care deeply as an act of thanksgiving. Caring deeply is not just central to our God for All covenant, but to who God is and to how he asks us to live for His Kingdom's sake. Happy Easter.

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

CARING deeply is a value and priority that we can all be committed to and engaged in. Our involvement flows from a gratitude for all that we have received from the God who so often reaches us through the kindness of others, whether from our closest loved ones or the unexpected attentiveness of a stranger, and from our response to God's call to love our neighbours in every way open to us, so that, near and far, wounds can be bound and communities enabled to flourish.



Caring deeply involves a release of grace and a growing in maturity, as we learn how to 'be with' others, rather than presuming to 'do for' them. It invites us to listen carefully to what is needed, and to pay attention to our own internal 'noise', so that our prejudices and assumptions don't get in the way.

This compassionate endeavour underpins and connects every aspect of our God for All calling: if we care deeply, we will instinctively want to follow daily, tread gently and speak boldly, so that all may respond to God's way, purposes and love, offered and revealed in the crucified, risen Christ, for the justice and flourishing of all.

**Rev Martyn Coe, Coordinator,  
United Reformed Church  
Cumbria Partnership**

JESUS echoes the prophets in saying that for God right words without right action blow away in the wind. The URC in the North West have an anti-poverty strategy; it's part of being 'a church with people on the margins'. Over the next few months some of our churches will display banners reading 'Let's abolish poverty'. Unless we also act in our local community these remain words flapping in the wind.



Round the world, and in Cumbria, we have appalling numbers of people who live in poverty. I am privileged and saddened to chair a foodbank. I am saddened because the existence of foodbanks is a symptom of injustice.

If we care deeply our words will be matched by deeds. Some of our care is like First Aid - we do it because it's needed, but we would rather it wasn't needed. God cares for the whole person and so do we as Christians; it is part of how we share the love of God. Jesus helped people pray well, eat well, feel well and have life in all its fullness.

When those around us can tell that our concern is deeper than words, then we will have become those who are showing Christ to others.





On tour: The pair have performed in dozens of churches including, from left, St Olaf's, Wasdale Head; St Andrew's, Penrith; and St Mary, Holme Cultram

# Top brass from local duo



In unison: Eleanor and Dave playing at St Peter's Church in Field Broughton near Grange-over-Sands **LORNE CAMPBELL**

By Dave Roberts

A TRAIN journey from Edinburgh to Kendal proved the catalyst for two musicians to embark on an ambitious tour of all the Anglican churches in Cumbria.

Eleanor Knowles and her friend Dave Higson were travelling back from the Scottish capital after an enjoyable few days' busking with her two sons.

All are accomplished brass instrumentalists, with Dave – a former trumpet major in the Army – having taught the Knowles family over the years.

Eleanor explains: "We'd had a really great time busking and on the train journey back I explained that I wanted to play more so I said, 'Why don't we try to play in somewhere really exciting, like a church building?' I suggested we play in Kendal Parish Church because the building's acoustics meant it would sound lovely."

Dave continues: "By the time we'd got to Oxenholme it had moved on to us playing in all the Anglican churches in south Cumbria which has since morphed into us playing in every Anglican church across the whole of the county!"

Their 'tour' began in August 2022, with a performance at Holy Trinity Kendal. The pair have now created their own Expedition Brass Facebook page and, so far, have played in more than 80 of the 356 churches in the Diocese of Carlisle. All are carefully detailed on a map which is overseen by Eleanor's youngest son Rory, himself a talented cornet payer.

"At the first church we played at, we took photos both inside and out, and I wrote a few lines about it and that has continued throughout," Eleanor says. "Within a few weeks, we'd played in quite a few churches, and I began to realise that I wanted to document our experiences in a more detailed blog which now appears on our Facebook page.

"More and more people

## ■ Eleanor and Dave tour all 356 churches in the Diocese

became aware of it and we realised that this was turning into some kind of a project – a very enjoyable one!

"While Dave and I don't go to church regularly we still both realised that a church space is beautiful, and you can fill it with sound in an extraordinary way. The emotional and historical legacy of a church building has a power of its own and we're delighted to be able to tap into that. The sound of a brass instrument being played in a church is simply beautiful."

The duo squeeze their church tour around other commitments – Eleanor is a teacher at Grasmere C of E Primary School and she and her husband also run the family business, the Badger Bar in Rydal. Dave is busy with music teaching commitments while also running the Burneside Brass Band's training band.

While an accomplished pianist, Eleanor only started playing brass instruments six years ago, initially the tuba before a move to the euphonium in 2022.

Dave started playing brass at the age of 11 in his home town of Manchester. Five years later he joined the Army and served

nearly 18 years as a musician, studying at the Royal Military School of Music. He also served as a medic, completing a tour in the First Gulf War, and became a paramedic in Cumbria when he left the forces.

After not playing for about 10 years, he felt moved to join Burneside Brass Band and went on to create an all-age training band which now has 28 members. Two years ago, he was appointed musical director of Burneside Brass.

Both he and Eleanor are adamant that the Expedition Brass tour does not represent a series of church concerts.

He adds: "We have a programme which lasts for about two hours. But far from us advertising ourselves as performers who are putting on some concerts, this is all about us enjoying the experience of playing in these amazing buildings.

"If people happen to turn up and listen to us when we're playing then that is an added bonus but, equally, if we spend two hours playing on our own in a church, that's just as special."

■ *If you would like the pair to play in your church, search for Expedition Brass on Facebook.*



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# Ex-GPs address hidden pandemic – loneliness

■ Upper Eden volunteer group set up to befriend those most at risk of social isolation

By Dave Roberts

“THE physical impact it can have on people’s health is terrible. It’s been likened to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.”

Retired GP Ashley Liston is talking about the toll that chronic loneliness can have, not just mentally but physically too.

He continues: “Once you understand that, you begin to appreciate that loneliness really is not good for you. But befriending those people who are struggling is good for you! When you see people responding so positively to a one-hour-a-week visit it’s so uplifting. For those people who are struggling with loneliness it can be the highlight of the week.”

That’s why Ashley is spearheading a new Linking Lives initiative in the Upper Eden area, where he lives with his wife Jane, also a retired doctor.

The couple – who attend Winton United Church – are drawing on faith communities as well as those who don’t attend church to support the project focussing on Appleby, Kirkby Stephen and surrounding villages. A team of befrienders is being recruited to draw alongside people identified by service providers as being at risk of isolation and loneliness.

Ashley explains: “Statistics for the UK show that seven per cent of people are affected by this issue; some people describe it as a pandemic. For those in rural areas, loneliness can be even more of an issue. There tend to be higher levels in rural settings, but it can be more of a hidden problem.

“We are encouraged by the level of support we’ve received so far. We have only just set up, but we already have 10 volunteers who are training as befrienders. Our aim is to have 20 by the end of our first year. We’ve also heard accounts of people who were befriended who then grew in confidence, began to socialise more and eventually became volunteers themselves. That’s wonderful!”

The project sees volunteers paired up with a ‘Link Friend’ who they visit weekly for about an hour. The Upper Eden team accept referrals from statutory organisations such as social workers and GPs as well as charities, family members or self-referrals. Seven people have been referred so far. All are now having initial home visits to ensure they are paired up with the best befriender for them.



Forging links: Jane and Ashley Liston at home in the Upper Eden Valley

DAVE ROBERTS

In the last year Ashley – chair of trustees – and other team members have set up the charity, arranged a bank account, fundraised and appointed an Upper Eden Linking Lives co-ordinator. Training sessions are regularly rolled out.

Linking Lives UK is the national Christian charity which supports development of the schemes. Its report for 2022/23 shows 58 schemes are making regular home visits, telephone calls or both to around 700 people experiencing loneliness across England, Scotland and Wales.

The Upper Eden scheme is one of several in Cumbria: a Linking Lives project has existed in Cockermouth since 2018; Two’s Company runs in Keswick; and a Penrith project is into its second year.

“We recognise the importance of the local connections we have,” Ashley says, “so every two months, members of the Linking Lives schemes in Cumbria come together online to share experiences, encourage one another and compare notes. We would also be delighted to support people who want to explore setting up a scheme elsewhere in the county.”

Through the Penrith Linking Lives project, Jane acted as a befriender for two people during the

Covid pandemic. Lockdowns at that time meant the weekly meetings had to be conducted by telephone or virtually but she says the benefits were clear.

“Lockdown was a time when we were acutely aware of how vulnerable people were if they were alone,” she says. “So I welcomed the chance to draw alongside two people. We would talk for an hour at a time, and I felt that both people really valued that connection, having another voice coming into their lives.

“To be a good befriender, you need to be a ‘people person’ and have an interest in others. Also, it helps to be able to open up about yourself and be good at listening.”

Both Ashley and Jane say the Linking Lives scheme provides an outward demonstration of their Christian faith.

“This gets us out into our community,” Ashley concludes. “I liken it to the story of the Good Samaritan. It’s about us getting our hands dirty and helping those people who really need that human connection. It’s also about understanding that we may be befriending some people who may otherwise never set foot in a church.”

■ For more information, phone 0800 6889984 or email [uppereden@linkinglives.uk](mailto:uppereden@linkinglives.uk).

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# Jesus talks to children in their 'native tongue'



**Focused:** The children watch a film as part of the Life Exhibition in Barrow



**Tablets:** Year 5 pupils YoYo, Aaliyah and Miruna use digital media to connect with the life of Jesus

PICTURES: DAVE ROBERTS

## ■ On this page and the next, we look at a digital installation helping pupils understand Christianity

By Dave Roberts

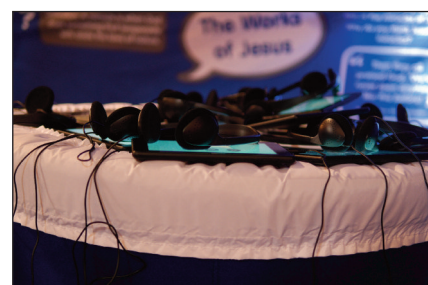
“THEY'RE just loving it! The combination of coming into church and then having this technology – which is always a winner with children – means they are all having a fantastic time!”

Neil Irving, a teacher at Greengate Primary School in Barrow, reflects on a visit by his pupils to the town's St Paul's Church for a special digital Life Exhibition.

In March, the church became the first in Cumbria to host the multi-media installation which uses five special pop-up tents and dozens of digital tablets to help children encounter more about Jesus.

The installation is run by Christian charity Counties UK and tours churches across the UK. Over a week in Barrow, the church welcomed nearly 20 groups of Year 5 and Year 6 pupils to the exhibition, meaning they were able to engage with around 500 children.

Four classes a day visited with each spending an hour using the digital media, firstly visiting an introductory pod which explores who Jesus is before splitting into groups to visit other pop-up tents focusing on Jesus' works



**Message:** Headphones and tablets help spread the word

and miracles, his teachings and Old Testament prophecies. The interactive experience is enhanced through use of digital tablets and headphones.

The children come back together to watch a film which explores the death and resurrection of Jesus before they are invited to participate in an interactive poll about what they've learned.

The Rev Robin Ham, Vicar of St Paul's Barrow, says: “It's fast-moving and there's lots of engagement, but the kids love it and so do the teachers. You could see as soon as the children came into church they were surprised – it was not what they were expecting.

“With the tablets and headphones, it is the children who are in their natural element and we as adults are thinking ‘I think I can do this’. So, to be able to

present the Christian faith in this way is very powerful for them. It's their own native tongue if you like.

“In terms of engagement we've seen teachers messaging their friends to say, ‘You need to get your school along to this’ and as for the kids, in our conversations with them afterwards, it's clear that they've taken things in and are thinking about Jesus.”

After securing funding in January, Robin wrote to all local schools inviting them to the multi-media Life Exhibition, which has run since 2006. A mixture of church and non-church schools have attended.

Nine-year-old Dylan from Greengate Primary reflects: “It was really good. It shows you about the meaning of life. It shows you more about Jesus' story, what he did and who he is.”

The Diocese of Carlisle has helped fund the Life Exhibition in Barrow as well as three others which are set to take place at Carlisle Cathedral from June 3 to 6, Ignite Network Youth Church at The Gathering in Penrith from July 8 to 12, and at Christ Church, Cockermouth, in the next academic year.

■ *To volunteer for the Ignite Life Exhibition, please contact [chair@ignitepenrith.co.uk](mailto:chair@ignitepenrith.co.uk) or, for more details, visit <https://www.countiesuk.org/schools-work/life-exhibition/schools>.*



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# 'It's fast-moving... the kids love it and so do the teachers'



**Engaging:** Clockwise, from top of the page, Year 5 pupils Ruby and Jacob are keen to answer a question; some of the children discovering more about Jesus from the tablets; Leah focuses on the learning; the Rev Robin Ham leads one of the sessions; Aubery is one of about 500 children who took part



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# Challenging roles bring inspiration for Readers

## ■ ‘Sound’ training is rewarded

By Dave Roberts

“I GET such a kick out of being able to encourage people in their faith. That’s what really inspires me. Also, because so many of us have worked in our ‘day jobs’ whilst training, I think we understand how to take our faith out into the wider world. I think it is brilliant to be a lay person who has sound theological training.”

Annie Garden reflects on what she considers to be the major benefits of being a Reader (or Licensed Lay Minister). And with nearly 22 years’ Reader service under her belt – seven of those as Warden of Readers in the Diocese of Carlisle – she speaks with authority.

But Annie also recognises the demands Reader training can place on people. She trained while working as an obstetrician gynaecologist, senior university lecturer and head of a Liverpool medical school.

“Reader training is really quite hard work,” she notes. “You’re not doing much less than those people training for incumbency. Unfortunately, we are losing folk who don’t want to commit to that degree of training.”

“Equally, there a lot of people who may previously have considered Readership but who are now being encouraged to go for ordination and become self-supporting ministers. There are also many more opportunities to become involved in lay ministry in other ways which is wonderful to see.”

It means Reader numbers have fallen sharply in the county in recent years – currently standing at 89, including those with Permission To Officiate – whilst the average age of a Reader has increased. They can lead services, preach, teach, act as chaplains and offer funeral ministry.

As Warden of Readers, Annie oversees the administration and licensing renewals for Readers, and arranges annual training sessions and a retreat every two years.

One of those to be licensed as a



Licensed Lay Ministers: Annie Garden and Jonathan Elvy at St Mary's Walney

PICTURES: DAVE ROBERTS

## ‘CONNECTION BETWEEN SECULAR WORLD AND FAITH’



**JULIE Graham, left, has been a Reader since 2016 and is licensed to St James Carlisle. She took early retirement last year from her senior management role with Capita, meaning she can now devote more time to her ministry. Having always been connected to church, her faith grew further after completing a ‘Just Looking’ course. It led to her involvement with youth ministry and then Reader training from 2014.**

I LOVED the training. It’s wonderful to be trained to a high theological level, though it can create pressures when you are also working full-time. Bishop James always used to say that Readers are the connection between the secular world and workplace and faith. Of

course, ordained people operate in the secular world, but I think that Readers do so more and there are real opportunities as a result.

“People at work knew I was a Reader, and I was always more than happy to talk about it. When I was licensed, I told my work colleagues, who were very encouraging. They already knew I was a Christian but it meant that when they asked what I’d been doing at the weekend I could talk about the fact that I’d been preaching.

“The problem is that people don’t really understand the term ‘Reader’. After I was licensed, I remember one person asking, ‘So that means you can now read the lesson in church then?’ I do find

the term a little frustrating and occasionally I’ll introduce myself as a Licensed Lay Minister.

“Now I’ve taken early retirement I’m also looking at developing more pastoral ministry and the possibility of taking services at old people’s homes. I’m also keen to explore bereavement support.

“There’s an important place for Licensed Lay Ministers: to preach, to teach, to offer pastoral support, to offer funeral ministry. I love my ministry and, through it, I want to support my vicar and the team at St James. It’s a privilege to study God’s word and then share it more widely in a way that people will understand it. I feel excited when I’m able to share that with a congregation!”

Reader in recent years is Jonathan Elvy, who serves Barrow Deanery, but particularly St Mary’s Walney and St John’s Barrow Island. The 56-year-old must juggle his ministry whilst working as a site manager at Barrow’s pupil referral unit. The Covid pandemic also impacted his Reader training – which went online – meaning he was licensed in January 2021.

He explains: “To be honest, when I started training, I didn’t really fully understand what a Reader was! I had never preached

before but as the training continued, I realised that I was really enjoying it and I grew in confidence.

“Soon after I was licensed our vicar left, meaning I was leading two services a month for more than two years. It really was a case of keeping things going. Working full-time and family commitments mean that can be difficult, but I really love the sense of being able to help and lead the services.”

Jonathan now works closely with the Rev Stuart Silk, Priest in Charge at St Mary’s, who has been

in post for nine months. Stuart recognises the challenging start that Jonathan had to his Reader ministry: training during the pandemic and supporting a parish in vacancy.

He says: “I want to see Jonathan flourish and in turn our ministry here will flourish too. It is about giving the right level of expectation and opportunity at the right time. I recognise the value of Reader ministry and I really want to help, support and invest in Jonathan. An important part of that is the offer of feedback so he can

be the best he can be.”

Jonathan adds: “I think Reader ministry can act as a bridge between ordained ministry and laity; as a Reader you have a foot in both camps. I feel that God called me to this ministry to support the parish during the interregnum.

“I’m naturally quite an introverted person but God has given me the strength to be a Reader. Now let’s see what plans he has for the future!”

■ For more information, visit [www.carlisle-diocese.org.uk/readers/](http://www.carlisle-diocese.org.uk/readers/).



# God's path led Gareth to forestry career and MBE

■ Award recipient plays major role in Wild Ennerdale collaboration

By Dave Roberts

GARETH Browning's life could have been very different. He planned to study civil engineering at Nottingham University but failed to get the necessary A level grades. Instead that drew him to his passion for the outdoors and a fulfilling career in forestry.

"I believe it was God's intention that I didn't do that course because I struggled with end-of-year assessments," Gareth reflects. "But thanks to the support of my parents and the prayers of members of the Baptist Church which I attended, I found God's path for me. I feel really blessed that this is how it came to be!"

It's a journey which has seen Gareth enjoy more than 30 years as a forester in Cumbria, with the 57-year-old receiving an MBE last year in recognition of his services to forestry and nature recovery.

After completing a three-year college course in Inverness, in 1990 Gareth moved to Cumbria with his wife Ruth. He began work with the Forestry Commission as a trainee forester.

He eventually took on management of a forest 'beat' with responsibility for tree felling, replanting, maintenance, archaeology and wildlife habitats.

His 'beat' has changed three times, although he has stayed in north Cumbria. He now has responsibility for the forests around Bassenthwaite Lake, Setmurthy, Howgill, Messengermire and Isel near Cockermouth and Ennerdale – an area covering a total of 4,700 hectares.

He says: "I've spent over 30 years in Cumbria and have enjoyed all the various roles as a forester. It's unusual for a forester to stay in one place but I love north Cumbria: the landscape and the people. I simply would not want to leave."

"The role I'm in now is a holistic one. The forest is a complex environment but it's so rewarding to see over time how a forest can develop and change. You have to think long-term; our plans are typically 40 to 60 years in timespan."

"I've also come to understand that nature is doing its own thing, regardless of what I may try to do to help. So, working with nature is even more rewarding."

That sense of working with nature has seen a focus on re-wilding in Ennerdale. In 2003 the Wild Ennerdale partnership was formed - a collaboration between Forestry England, National Trust, United Utilities and Natural England.

"We started to explore how we could look after the valley differently. How could we give nature more freedom? What should be here that's missing? What's being blocked from working? It's about listening to nature."

That approach has seen a move away



Gareth Browning: 'I have a complete sense of awe as to what God has done in creating nature'

DAVE ROBERTS

from intensive sheep grazing in the valley bottom with the re-introduction of extensive year-round grazing by black Galloway cattle. The animals help 'dynamically disturb' the landscape, leading to a 63 per cent increase in bird numbers over ten years and a 23 per cent increase in the number of species.

Bridges have been removed to allow gravel movement down the River Liza to support Arctic char spawning grounds. Native trees including Scots pine, aspen and juniper have been replanted to reduce non-native Sitka spruce. Marsh fritillary butterflies have also been reintroduced in partnership with the charity Butterfly Conservation.

"The cattle have been introduced at one per 20 hectares which is much less intensive than sheep grazing," says Gareth.

"They can't access the steeper slopes and they graze by ripping with their tongues and more selectively than sheep. As a result we have seen a positive impact on the natural environment. We've even seen ancient woodland expanding up to the ridge line as that land is being grazed differently. That's not heard of anywhere else in the Lake District."

"People ask me, 'What is the hardest thing about looking after Ennerdale?' I tell them it's about not intervening. It's about stepping back and letting nature do things, accepting that along the way it may not necessarily look like we expected it to."

Gareth also recognises that his work chimes with one of the central themes of

the county's ecumenical God for All vision and strategy: Tread Gently.

He adds: "Clearly we need food and housing which can have significant impacts on the landscape, but where we can, we should try to reduce our footprint – to tread gently – and think differently about our landscape."

Gareth's is a vocation which is central to his faith. He and his family have worshipped at Christ Church Cockermouth for more than 10 years and for the last five he has been a member of the leadership team. He and Ruth also lead a Messy Church.

"Messy Church is wonderful. The messier it is the better it is," Gareth laughs. "And that's the same for nature too: it's all messy and intermixed but it's something quite beautiful. I have a complete sense of awe as to what God has done in creating nature. I've learned to give nature greater freedom so it can do its thing; similarly, as Christians, we need to allow the Holy Spirit more freedom to lead, inspire and guide us."

Gareth's work saw him awarded an MBE in the King's 2023 Birthday Honours List. He and his family travelled to Windsor Castle for the ceremony.

He concludes: "It was wonderful to see King Charles and to meet the other recipients. The King has been to Ennerdale on a couple of occasions. He officially opened The Gather community space in the valley in 2016 and he asked me how that was going. He was delighted to hear it was doing well."



Honour: Gareth after receiving his MBE at Windsor Castle, pictured with his wife Ruth, son Aran and daughter Bethany

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# Couple shed layers in first eco-vicarage

■ Vicar's family cut bills in move to Net Zero Carbon house

By Dave Roberts

“AS MUCH as we talk about us all being equal and trying to do the best we can, there I was living in a rather big house that was eating away at resources. If we kept the heating on as we used to, we were going to be paying about £12,000 a year in bills.

“We had to reduce that dramatically, so we were only facing bills of £7,000 a year, but then we had to wrap up in jumpers and wear hats and gloves inside to keep warm. It was a bit chilly!”

The Rev Canon Angela Whittaker, the leader of the Helm Mission Community, explains the predicament she, her husband, Andrew, and their family faced when living in an old Victorian vicarage in Natland, near Kendal.

But those problems have now disappeared after the couple moved into the Diocese of Carlisle's first Net Zero Carbon vicarage.

Angela adds: “After only a week in the property we could not believe the difference. The house is so warm! We've had to review our wardrobes; fleecy blankets are now being put away and we haven't had to use a hot water bottle. It's completely different!”

The Diocese bought the property last year and carried out work to make it Net Zero Carbon. That included installing a new air source heat pump, pressurised water heating system, better insulation in the roof space, new external doors and solar panels on the roof and battery storage to provide two-thirds of the electricity supply.

Nick Paxman, the Diocesan Property Manager who oversaw the work, says: “We are delighted with what has been achieved. The old Victorian vicarage in the village, though charming to look at, was expensive for us to maintain and, more importantly, impossibly expensive for our vicar to heat.

“We needed an answer and one that was in line with our Net Zero Carbon challenge. So, we've focused on removing the traditional central heating boiler – in this case fuelled by gas – and replaced it with an air source heat pump.”

The monthly cost of heating the 22-year-old property has been slashed to about £75 with potential to sell on to energy providers any surplus electricity generated by the solar panels.

The costs of buying the newer



Warmer now! The Rev Canon Angela Whittaker with her husband Andrew outside the new vicarage in Natland

PICTURES: DAVE ROBERTS



'Green': New features include solar panels and, right, and an air source heat pump

property and the associated Net Zero Carbon works and further renovations will be offset by the sale of the Victorian vicarage, with the Diocese investing the residue in support of future mission and ministry across the county.

It follows last October's Diocesan Synod – the local general assembly made up of bishops, archdeacons and elected clergy and laity – at which members formally endorsed the Diocesan Net Zero Action Plan.

Anna Newlove, Diocesan Pastoral and Net Zero Officer, liaised with the property team as work

was completed on the vicarage.

She reflects: “It's exciting to see the work that has been completed and the difference it has already made to the building's energy performance.

“I've worked closely with our property team to ensure, for instance, that the additional electricity costs of the heat pump are offset by the solar panel installations to attain Net Zero Carbon status. We are all thrilled with the results, and we will now be completing a new Energy Performance Certificate for the property.”

Net Zero Carbon status for the

property will be monitored using a national Church of England energy footprint tool – also used for church buildings, schools and the Diocesan head office in Penrith.

The Diocese has budgeted £250,000 a year for the next five years towards a programme of Net Zero Carbon works on various properties. The Natland vicarage is one of three to be developed initially. Work is underway on Net Zero Carbon improvements at a recently purchased vicarage in Grasmere with further work scheduled on a third property in Wigton at Easter.



Work acknowledged: Derek Hurton, Diocesan Secretary, and Anna Newlove with the award

## Green efforts across county recognised by UK charity

THE Diocese of Carlisle has gained a bronze eco award in recognition of its environmental focus.

A Rocha UK – a Christian charity working to protect and restore the natural world – presented the award after the Diocese worked on environmental projects at its Church House head office in Penrith and encouraged churches across Cumbria to register as Eco Churches.

Anna Newlove, Diocesan Net Zero Officer, said: “Work towards the bronze award started in 2022 as we encouraged more churches to become Eco Churches. That continued through 2023 with a particular focus on our head office and improved work practices there.

“We're delighted to have received this award which acknowledges the firm commitment we have made to environmental issues. We're committed to working towards the next level Eco Diocese award over the coming years.”

The bronze award considers the Diocese's Net Zero Action plan endorsed by Synod last October, as well as the work of its environmental group which monitors action and progress.

Ten per cent of churches must also be registered under the Eco Church scheme and five per cent must have gained an award. A fifth of churches in the Diocese are currently registered with 10 per cent having already gained an award.

The award also takes account of the promotion of environmental issues in church schools and is a reflection of how eco issues are embedded in ministerial training.

Last December, a separate bronze award was issued for Church House in recognition of the installation of sensor-activated LED lighting, a commitment to minimise printing and the introduction of recycled paper.



# Community offers retreat into the rhythm of prayer

■ Couple establish Lake District ‘space for encounter with God’

By Dave Roberts

IT'S A grey, rainy day in the Vale of Lorton as I head for the Poiema Community and Retreat House. But despite such dreary weather there's a beauty and stillness about the place.

It is that which has drawn the Rev Andrea Ward and her husband, Pete, to set up a Christian community here, based in the former Loweswater vicarage. It's taken 10 years for the couple to find the right setting.

“It was in 2014 that we began to sense a change of direction,” Andrea says. “We started to think and pray about a community and retreat house and I went off on a sabbatical through which I was able to explore new monasticism.”

“I also undertook a course in Ignatian spirituality – part of which was training to be a spiritual director – and that all helped lead me to discover and embrace where God was leading us.”

Before Poiema – ‘handiwork’ in Greek – Andrea had been a parish priest both in the Diocese of Chester – where she served her curacy after ordination training at Ridley Hall, Cambridge – and later for 14 years in Rochester Diocese. She worked in Greater London for a decade before a further four years’ ministry in a deprived urban setting in Chatham.

She had previously made a Christian commitment aged 17, and after completing residential social work she then spent three years in Scotland working for Youth With A Mission and another four years as a pastoral worker in her home church in Ashted, Surrey, before training for ordination.

She and Pete say they felt a calling from God to the Poiema Community. It's a place which is rooted in prayer.

Pete continues: “We purposefully wanted to identify as being a retreat house, a small praying community. This is not a huge retreat centre, so it feels much more personal an experience for those who join us. They come along to spend time with us, to eat with us and to pray with us.”

“We believe this is about a sense of creating community. People who come here can experience our rhythms of prayer. We are also just beginning to explore how others



**New spiritual direction:** The Rev Andrea Ward and her husband Pete

DAVE ROBERTS

who are connected to us can join our prayer rhythms in a more dispersed way but still feel very much part of our community.

“At our core we believe we are called to hold a space for encounter with God and we also want to create a space in which people can be encouraged to feel that God considers them to be his handiwork, his masterpiece. In turn that helps people understand their identity in Christ and their calling, based on Ephesians 2:10.”

The power of prayer is central for Pete. In the 1990s, while working in the IT division for Thames Water, he spent his spare time engaged in youth work at Greyfriars Church in Reading.

In 2000, the church discovered the 24-7 Prayer movement and subsequently set up a prayer room, leading to 13 weeks of 24-hour prayer.

That led to Pete becoming a member of the leadership team that established the Reading



**Sharing:** Visitors are invited to eat together

Boiler Room, a house of prayer and mission located in a disused town centre pub.

After a sabbatical and then a return to Thames Water, Pete was offered the role of General Manager for 24-7. He is now the charity's IT Director.

The Diocese of Carlisle gifted

the couple the use of the vicarage and they moved there in January 2023. After completing work on the house, they began accepting bookings for day retreats and themed quiet days last July. In November they opened up for residential retreats too, with a group of clergy among the first



**Peaceful setting:** Carlisle Diocese gifted the couple the use of the former Loweswater vicarage

visitors, followed by individual bookings.

Pete and Andrea, who is also associate priest for the benefice of Lorton and Loweswater with Buttermere, pray three times a day in their chapel: at 8.30 in the morning, at midday and finally compline at 9.30 at night.

“When people are with us, we invite them to join us in that rhythm of prayer, be they here for a day retreat, quiet day or residential,” Andrea explains.

Pete adds: “It's so important for us when welcoming people here that they feel a sense of sharing life together. One of the deepest ways you can do that is around the meal table, so we invite people to eat with us. I think in society we are starting to lose that somewhat and, in turn, that is impacting on the wider sense of community.”

The retreats are as informal or structured as people want them to be. Both Pete and Andrea are trained spiritual directors so can also provide individually guided retreats. In these, particular Bible readings are offered up to those on retreat to reflect and pray on, and subsequently to explore how the verses have spoken to them.

Poiema works on a voluntary donation basis, with suggested tariffs for retreats and quiet days.

Andrea concludes: “Ultimately, prayer is about our relationship with God. Out of that communion grows everything else including our own personal formation and our sense of call. It underpins everything.”

■ To find out more, visit [www.poiema.community](http://www.poiema.community).



# Retiring archdeacon ready for new chapter in his life

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

**A** I'm 68 years old and married to Diane – a recently retired teacher – with whom I have three grown-up sons, Edmund, Roger and Aidan. We also have two grandchildren and a third on the way.

I've served in Cumbria for more than 26 years, initially as Priest-in-Charge of St Cuthbert's with St Mary's in Carlisle from 1997 before my appointment as Archdeacon of West Cumberland in 2009. At that time, I moved from Carlisle to live in Workington where we've been since. From 2020 I served as Associate Archdeacon of West Cumberland whilst also holding parochial duties for Maryport, before my appointment as Archdeacon of Carlisle last year.

I've also held a number of other Diocesan roles, serving as Communications Officer for 12 years and then assisting with communications from 2009. During my time overseeing communications there have been a number of notable incidents: the foot and mouth crisis, the west Cumbria shootings, the Tebay rail crash and several major floods.

I'm also the chair of the Diocesan Advisory Committee – overseeing church planning matters – and for four years have been chair of the board of Rydal Hall, the Diocese's Christian retreat and conference centre near Ambleside. I was made an Honorary Canon of Carlisle Cathedral in 2002.

Prior to ordination, I graduated from Oxford University with a maths degree, later teaching the subject in Ghana before working as a computer programmer and systems analyst in Peterborough. I attended Lincoln Theological College for training before serving my curacy at Wellingborough All Hallows in Northamptonshire before being appointed Team Vicar at Kingsthorpe with St David's in Northampton in 1987. Five years later I began serving a parish of 28,000 people as Vicar of Northampton St Benedict.

**Q** Why did you feel called to the role of Archdeacon?

**A** By my last couple of years as a vicar at St Cuthbert's, I had been a vicar for getting on for 25 years. I had done thousands of weddings, christenings and



Richard Pratt: 'I want to complete some theological reading and writing'

DAVE ROBERTS

## ■ In our latest Focus on Faith, we hear from the Ven Richard Pratt, Archdeacon of Carlisle, as he prepares for retirement

funerals – which it is a privilege to officiate at – but I was also getting tired. I'd had a lot of interaction with our archdeacons in my communications role so I was well aware of their responsibilities and I enjoy looking after and caring for our church buildings as well as dealing with wider strategy.

**Q** What have been the joys and the challenges of the role?

**A** I think I've faced three challenges. Firstly, it was about learning to work more through other people. Of course, you have to do that as a parish priest but as an archdeacon I had to get used to doing things entirely through other people.

Secondly, I recognise that there has been the odd occasion where there has been a failure following interviews to fill a vacancy. Naturally those decisions are collective ones but I recognise the difficulties that

may have been caused.

Thirdly, I've found it difficult to watch some parishes paint themselves into a corner. Change is necessary, we can't just keep on doing what we've always done as the world has changed around us beyond all recognition. It's sad to think that some churches may refuse to embrace change and they may just die as a result.

In terms of the joys, it has been absolutely wonderful to watch a vicar really make a go of something and turn something around. There are so many examples; well done to all those who have done so. It's also been wonderful to help facilitate change at a more global level as an archdeacon. For instance, in the west of the county we have worked really hard to appoint pioneer ministers. It may take a long time to work through but I'm sure it will mean the Church and God for All have a future.

I've enjoyed getting to know a

wider range of people. As archdeacon I've also looked after churches in vacancy, and it's been lovely to draw alongside new people and learn more about them.

**Q** What will be a particular memory from your years in ministry?

**A** I've enjoyed the liturgical high spots, the special services around Easter are always memorable. Seeing a full church is wonderful. I remember having 300 people in St Cuthbert's for a Christingle service – it was quite a sight.

Also, when ministering in Northampton we set up a mums and tots group. It had 60 mums or carers attend each week with their children. It was fantastic. You could hardly find an island of carpet to stand on among all the toddlers charging about. It was great fun!

There has also been the enormous privilege of being able to draw alongside people at mo-

mentous times in their lives: a wedding, a christening, a funeral, sitting with someone when they are dying.

**Q** What are your plans for the future?

**A** We are set to move to a house in the north of Scotland – halfway between Aberdeen and Inverness. There's a bit of work to do, which will include building a whole lot of bookcases! I'm planning on keeping ministering, probably offering myself on Sundays. As regards other plans, I'm thinking of gardening, cooking, offering some maths tutoring, and doing some driver training because I have an advanced driving qualification.

I also want to complete some theological reading and writing. I have a book on Parables that needs editing for publication and I intend to write about the theology of marriage, right-wing theology and a liberal Catholic manifesto.