

The Way



The FREE newspaper of the Church in Cumbria – Spring 2025



**NHS chaplain Ken
retires... aged 87!**

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**Monthly dose of fun,
fellowship and food**

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TO THE RESCUE

■ **Meet those supporting the health and wellbeing of others**

IN THIS edition of The Way we consider the various ways in which our church communities are looking to support the health and wellbeing of others.

We meet the west Cumbrian vicar and his congregant who take to the fells as members of a mountain rescue team.

A Methodist minister explains what he is doing to support the mental health of those in the farming community.

And a Barrow pioneer enabler is opening up a church hall each month for food, fun and fellowship.

All of this is undergirded by a key theme of our county's ecumenical God for All vision: to Care Deeply.

Caring deeply: The Rev Paul Kerry, left, and Phil Hall are both members of Wasdale Mountain Rescue Team

PICTURE: DAVE ROBERTS



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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

LOVE THYSELF

In an increasingly busy world, there are seemingly more and more pressures placed on people. It can feel hard to find a moment's piece as we are bombarded with information and news and work and family pressures mount. So, it is more important than ever that as Christians we do all we can to protect our health and wellbeing and that of others. Our ecumenical leaders reflect upon that Biblical imperative...



Rev Dr James Tebbutt, Chair, NW England District of the Methodist Church

VISITING in hospital recently, I witnessed another patient lash out at a nurse for performing a simple medical procedure. The patient was evidently suffering from dementia, a cruel, distorting disease, but it was still unjust, intolerable, that the nurse should suffer the outburst. Somehow, in her care and compassion, the nurse calmly withstood the experience. I was glad to thank her for it, and hoped that, even as the nurse tended to the health of her patient, she might find sufficient resilience and resource for herself.

To be deeply compassionate, attending, tending to another's experience,

frequently requires a costly commitment, collectively and individually, to tread gently, care deeply and sometimes to speak boldly, for the health and wellbeing of others.

To be engaged and sustained in this way requires repeated replenishment, a drawing in multiple ways from the living water of Christ's limitless love, poured out on the cross; a following daily that renews through resurrection.

In all the ways that we might compassionately love our neighbour, may we also find the gracious means to love, and to allow ourselves to be loved, that health and wellbeing might flow and flourish for all, through the love of God for all.

The Rt Rev Rob Saner-Haigh, Bishop of Penrith



Major David Taylor, Salvation Army Divisional Commander

THE Apostle Paul writes, "Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way" (2Thess. 3:17). Paul is speaking about something much richer and deeper than our modern ideas of peace, and no doubt aligns with the Jewish Paul's understanding of Shalom.

Shalom is a holistic understanding of our well-being together with others in the love, truth, grace, justice and mercy of God's good ordering of life. Shalom is something that God gives, but we actively pursue in co-operation with God.

Easter celebrates God's powerful, reconciling salvation for the world through Jesus Christ. How painfully ironic it is that God's kingdom of peace, his shalom, is delivered through the sacrificial suffering and death of Jesus.

There is no guarantee that 'caring deeply' in our service of others will not at times, in a fallen and selfish world, break our hearts. How important it is then for us to nurture the vision of community that sacrificially loves, serves, supports and raises each other into the wholeness of God's life and love, where we can be complete. Happy Easter!



Rev Martyn Coe, Coordinator, United Reformed Church Cumbria Partnership

"IS THERE any further danger?" I have been told to ask or check this on every first aid course I have ever done. (I started in Cub Scouts so it's a fair few!)

Some people have to notice the obvious danger and carry on; in caring for someone else they put themselves physically, mentally or spiritually at risk.

Afterwards though, after long, stressful times at work or in the family, after caring for someone injured or after active time in the military, how do we look after ourselves? Even in caring teams we can be more concerned about others than ourselves.

Jesus said to care for others as we would care for ourselves. Perhaps it is a saying which needs to work both ways - "care for yourself as you seek to care for others".

As a chaplain I value the team member who reminds me to take a break or makes sure I get time to process trauma at the end of an incident. I know what to do to care for others but sometimes I need reminding to apply that to myself.

As Jesus (almost) said, look after yourself then you will be able to look after others.



ALL of us will have particular phrases or quotations that have impacted us from things we have read or heard. For me, one of these is from a book I read many years ago called, 'The Day is Yours,' by Ian Stackhouse. In it, he writes that sleep is God's way of reminding us that we are not in charge.

Another way of putting this is that, whilst we are asleep, the world goes on without our involvement and attention. Too often we feel that we have to be on top of everything, that we have to pin down, organise and mitigate all risks and eventualities. This sort of responsibility is way above our ability or vocation!

"Do not be anxious", says Jesus, "the Lord knows what you need and will give it to you." Instead, we are to seek the kingdom of God first, and his righteousness, and all the things that we can spend our whole lives pursuing, competing for, trying to sort out, will be looked after by the God who alone can hold all things together.

Chaplain retires at 87 but says he has 'more to give'

■ Ken's rich and varied career comes to an end

By Dave Roberts

"HELLO. I'm Ken and I'm the hospital chaplain. I've come to make a nuisance of myself and then I'll go away again!' Usually that would break the ice, then I would go in and sit with them and listen and chat."

The Rev Ken Wright explains how he would first introduce himself to patients who were being treated at community hospitals in Workington, Maryport and Cockermouth.

With 28 years in the role, his passion for chaplaincy has seen him adopt that strategy countless times. He estimates that he has had 40,000 interactions with people over the years and he feels the role of a chaplain is an important bridge between faith and secular worlds. Ken was also chaplain to Seafarers, RNLI, the retail sector and various engineering firms

"You don't wait for somebody to come into church; this is all about going out and meeting people in their places," he says.

"I was an industrial chaplain at the steelworks in Workington. I would knock on a door and walk in. It could be a broom cupboard, or I could walk into a board meeting, but it was always exciting to find out what was behind that door and how to get onboard with the people I met."

He and his wife, Grace, moved to Cumbria in 1997 when he took up the industrial chaplaincy post – as well as a half-day chaplaincy with the NHS and supporting Northside, Seaton and Camerton churches for two days a week.

Ken had previously stepped down as a director for the vehicle inspectorate to attend Salisbury and Wells Theological College. Aged 53, he began his curacy in Bridgewater in Somerset in 1994 before making the move north.

He laughs: "There was a reluctance to let me go to theological college as they didn't think they'd get the mileage out of me. Well, I gave more service than any other member of that class of



Good luck! Ken's retirement and Epiphany Day party, during which he was 'king for the day'



Ken Wright: 'I loved every minute' DAVE ROBERTS

30 people. I feel that they got their money's worth after all!"

Before working as a civil servant, Ken served 18 years in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, leaving as a major; an experience which he says came in useful when he was a chaplain in the steelworks.

"I used to go up to the bridge above the rail rolling section and of course they all thought I was of no earthly use. They didn't know that my background was solid engineering," Ken recalls. "So, I went along

with that and pulled their legs for two or three months, but I was so impressed with the skill of them all. I learned a lot and I hope that they saw something in me as well."

Eventually, Ken chose to concentrate on NHS chaplaincy, focussing on three community hospitals in west Cumbria. His ministry has been equally important for patients, staff and visitors alike. And he says it has been a privilege to minister to those in palliative care and approaching end of life.

"I rode motorcycles for 68 years before eventually having to give up and I had a motorcycle pal who was in palliative care," Ken explains. "He was in agony, but he would not let go so I sat with him and his family, and I talked him through a motorcycle trip on one of our favourite routes we used to travel. I was with him when he rode into heaven; it was wonderful to be with him."

Now, with 28 years' chaplaincy ministry under his belt, Ken has finally retired, calling time on his 87th birthday with an Epiphany Day party at which he was 'king for the day'.

"I've loved every minute of it," he concludes. "I have found it very fulfilling, though I believe that I still have more to give."

"My vocation is to be with people, talking with them."

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Annie's many caring steps on the road to her calling

■ From teacher, therapist and charity co-ordinator to ordination

By Dave Roberts

A PLANNED journey to a New Age community in Scotland was to prove a life-changing moment for the Rev Annie Gray.

As she boarded a bus to take her to the train station, she says she was joined by another person... Jesus. Annie says he was still with her as she approached the railway ticket office.

"Instead of asking for a ticket to Forres, I suddenly asked for a ticket to Whitley Bay where I lived," she explains. "I couldn't understand what was going on, but as I sat there waiting for the train a woman walked past me wearing a cross. I thought she looked so peaceful. I wanted what she had."

Back in the north-east, Annie was invited to church by one of her close friends. "As I walked into the building I was flooded with golden light, I was speaking in tongues though I didn't realise it. When they made an altar call, I was there immediately and my life was changed forever," she recalls.

Growing up above a Blackpool amusement arcade, Annie had no real Christian influences, although she says, as a young child, she often felt called to sit in a town centre church.

Aged 17, she left for Newcastle and eventually became an art teacher before flying to India with her three-year-old daughter where she became interested in natural therapy, herbalism and homeopathy. Looking back, she recognises the Christian influences of a maid who used to clean the building where she lived and that of a Tamil Christian community where she was based.

Back in England she continued her training as a homeopath before her 'calling' back to Whitley Bay. There she joined a group called 'Women of God' who supported and nourished her growing faith.

Annie explains: "One night I woke up with a start as I'd heard a voice saying, 'You're going to run a service for people who have not got much money. It's going to be a charity for widows and older people'."

In 1993, with the support of local churches, she founded the New Life Natural Healthcare Clinic. Over 12 years, the Christian charity took on 27 therapists and also offered support, healing and wholeness services. Clients included people from churches, care homes and the homeless.

From that came the Simply Caring group through which church members were trained in hand and foot massage and listening skills. Working closely with GPs and health visitors, they supported isolated people in the community, with more than 80 volunteers coming alongside 5,000 peo-



Annie Gray: 'I see myself as a complementary therapist; I am not an alternative'

DAVE ROBERTS

ple across North Shields. "We made it clear we were a Christian service, though we were there to serve everyone," Annie says. "I used to have a piece of scripture on a poster behind my desk about the need to be born again. I'd never reference it but there were times it made people cry. That's when I realised how powerful the word of God was."

The clinic finally came to an end when Annie moved to Cumbria in 2003, but her passion for healing and wholeness did not dissipate.

In the aftermath of the foot and mouth crisis, she worked with mental health charity MIND offering support to the farming community. A car crash temporarily left her without the ability to read and write, meaning she had to leave work. Yet, at the same time, Annie felt a calling to ordained ministry, and was accepted for training.

From 2012, she served her curacy at Lanercost Priory as a self-supporting minister, while still working as a therapist, specialising in homeopathy, herbalism and the Bowen technique.

She became lead chaplain at the Cumberland Infirmary in Carlisle before a move to the Newcastle University chaplaincy team and serving as Priest in Charge at St John's Kingston Park. She eventually returned to Cumbria supporting Anna Chaplaincy for a short time while continuing her therapy work and leading two services a month with Permission To Officiate.

Annie concludes: "I see myself as being a complementary therapist. I am not an alternative. I believe I can complement the work of the NHS. I have worked as a therapist for over 40 years, and I have treated everything from depression to allergies to broken bones.

"It's important to have a Christian voice in the field of homeopathy and herbalism. I'm quite open about my faith and I've often found doors of dialogue open with the people I treat.

"I thank God that he brought me into this. I pray those doors continue to open through which I'm able to pray with people who previously may have never considered that Jesus had anything to offer them."



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Son's suicide leads David to focus on farm families

■ Minister raising mental health awareness in rural communities

By Dave Roberts

“EVERY minister is shaped by life experience in some way. There is a need to understand, acknowledge and yield to that so that God can use it.”

The Rev David Newlove is talking about a specific focus his ministry has taken in the last year – raising awareness of the pressures our farming communities are working under and the associated mental health impacts.

Tragically, it plays into a personal narrative for David and his family, following the loss of his 24-year-old son, Alec, to suicide. Alec had been living and farming in Louth, Lincolnshire. A keen hockey player and chair of Louth Young Farmers' Club, he was hugely popular. There was no indication of any difficulties before his death in March 2024.

It was devastating news for David's family.

For the Methodist Church's Cumbria Mission Area Lead and chair of the Cumbria Agricultural Chaplaincy Management Team, it has highlighted the pressures for those people living and working in isolated rural communities. He says he often has conversations with people about such issues as he walks around the Borderway Auction Mart in Carlisle.

“I have not looked for this ministry, but it has thrown itself at me,” David says. “People have come up to me to speak about Alec and say, ‘We have experience of that within our family too’. I grew up in a farming community and I know it's one where things are known about but not necessarily talked about.

“I didn't want that for Alec. I wanted to be honest whilst also recognising that this wasn't him. He was a kind, happy son who we were all hugely proud of and he was someone who had shown no sign of any mental stress or illness; this was not what he was like. It is important to separate these and to celebrate Alec for who he was and all that he achieved. At the same time, it's hugely important to acknowledge that mental health can affect anybody.”

A study by the Farm Safety Foundation in 2024 found 95 per cent of UK farmers under the age of 40 rank poor mental health as one of the biggest hidden problems



‘I don't blame God’: David Newlove at Carlisle's Borderway Mart

DAVE ROBERTS



No signs of stress: As well as working in the agricultural industry in Lincolnshire, Alec was a keen hockey player

facing farmers today with longer working hours in the industry impacting on levels of mental wellbeing. Office of National Statistics figures for 2021 showed 36 suicides were registered in England and Wales among the farming and agricultural industry.

Such research is also borne out by mental health nurse Gilly Steel, who supported Alec's friends in

Louth, and who told the BBC that young farmers living and working in isolated rural locations are “pushed to crisis point”.

Through his ministry, David wants to address this. He has become an advocate for mental health issues and has spoken about his family's story on news programmes on the BBC and ITV.

“One of the problems is that

farms are getting bigger, yet staffing is reduced so people are on their own a lot more,” David says. “I was a long-distance lorry driver once, so I fully understand what isolated working feels like and the impact that can have.

“My ministry around this continues to develop. I've had a few farmers come up to me to say they had seen me on telly and that's good because it's opened up the conversation to talk about the issues. There is something very important in my saying, ‘This is our experience, and I want to prevent others going through the same’.”

David is committed to drawing alongside the farming community, particularly in Lincolnshire where Alec was based. He has connected with the parents of Len Eadon, who set up a charity – Len's Light – in memory of their farming son. This raises awareness of the mental health and suicide issues faced by the rural community, with a focus on positive mental health.

He is also keen to continue to work alongside Alec's Young Farmers colleagues and is exploring training opportunities around

suicide prevention and awareness and to talk about ‘mental fitness’ and wellbeing.

“It's easy for people to talk about going to the gym regularly to look after their physical fitness but what do we all do routinely to look after our mental wellbeing? I want that to become a real focus.

“For the remainder of my life there will be the pain of not having Alec with us, but I know I shall see him again. I don't blame God. I know that God was with Alec throughout everything. Every Easter I use the phrase ‘He is Risen’, and I now feel I fully understand this relates to all people who have died too. I know that Alec has risen and he is with God.

“Of course, I'm still coming to terms with Alec's death but I do want to work around mental wellbeing. My prayer for my future ministry is that people who I engage with listen to me and that they allow my words to resonate with their own stories.”

■ *If you have been affected by issues raised here, there is support via Cumbrian suicide prevention charity Every Life Matters at www.every-life-matters.org.uk.*



Reaching out: Clockwise from left, Opa Geibel chats with people at the Sunday afternoon Cameo session; volunteer Julie Jones prepares food for the gathering; and Reader Judy Morris delivers a 'God spot'

PICTURES: DAVE ROBERTS

New initiative is all about people coming together

By Dave Roberts

IT'S Sunday afternoon and volunteers are busy setting up the church hall of St Aidan's Barrow, ready to welcome people in for food, fellowship and friendship.

Everyone has particular tasks: the team in the kitchen are well on with cooking cottage pie, others are putting out chairs and tables, while a few more prepare children's toys and games.

It is all in support of a new form of church for the local community. Cameo – Come And Meet Each Other – happens monthly on a Sunday from 3.30 to 5pm and is led by Opa Geibel, a Pioneer Enabler in Barrow.

He explains: "I love living in Barrow. People are so friendly and welcoming. As a pioneer, my task is to reach out to those people who may not necessarily walk through a church door.

"Many of the people I engage with have questions about faith but often connected to the nitty gritty of life: mental health, general wellbeing, bereavement, suicidal thoughts. That's really helped me to connect with people.

"One of my main tasks is to reach out to younger people – those aged 16 to 35 – and we get a good number of families and younger generations here at Cameo.

"I love bringing people together of different ages and backgrounds

■ Young and old meet monthly for food, friendship and exploring ideas

and that is what we have here. It is about helping people come together, meet each other and, in the process, have an opportunity to explore life and faith together."

Opa moved to the town with his wife three years ago. Originally from Germany, he previously travelled the world on mission work with Operation Mobilisation before later studying at the Belfast Bible College and then moving to the north of England. In Barrow he is also chaplain to sixth form colleges and the Sea Cadets.

On the day that I visit, three new young couples from the town's Newbarns estate have arrived with their children. They engage with tabletop crafts and quizzes.

These new families join others, including Angelina and Allan McClure, who were made aware of Cameo through leaflets in their church.

Angelina says: "We started coming last year and came the whole year through. It gives us joy, peace and a change of scenery. It gives us a chance to meet other people and hear about their difficulties and to let people know they have someone they can turn to."

As part of the Cameo session,

Judy Morris, a Reader at St Aidan's, led a short talk on a Bible verse – aimed specifically at the children.

She says: "I was keen to get involved with this initiative. It gives people and families a space to meet and have food together. At the start we provided snacks but I suggested we move to hot food as, for some families, that could be an issue when they're getting home after five o'clock at night.

"I love being with people, I love helping with cooking and being involved with crafts, so this gives personal rewards too.

"There are a lot of people who need company; that is what the church is offering here.

"In the last year we have added a distinct 'God spot' which involves acting out a Bible story with the kids. It provides people with more context as to why we're doing this and the boundaries of our faith that we're working within.

"We're a multi-generational community. The oldest people are in their 70s and the youngest are babies. There could be a young mum here who feels isolated or someone older who feels that Sunday afternoons drag on and they feel lonely."

The work of Cameo has been recognised by the local council, with some funding being made available, helping Opa connect with other local community centres. A community café has been launched as an off-shoot.

Opa concludes: "There is a lot of collective wisdom in the room from those who come here and our amazing team members.

"There's an opportunity for wellbeing in the wider sense, to talk about life and to have a time of prayer which is asked for by

many. Everyone has ups and downs in life, and this is a wonderful place where people can come together to talk openly and honestly and ask questions of faith and find deeper hope. I think that draws in a lot of people.

"I can see God working by just bringing people through our doors. I know of people who were at a bus stop and who were invited to come along, and it helped change their lives! Sometimes I'm tired on a Sunday afternoon and so have to drag myself along to set things up but when I leave, I'm bouncing! It's amazing to see people connect with each other and connect with God."

■ For more information, visit <https://www.facebook.com/groups/cameo>.



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Lost, found and saved

■ All in a day's work for a vicar and Mountain Rescue volunteer



Ready: Phil, left, and Paul at Wasdale MRT's base DAVE ROBERTS

THE similarities between the Rev Paul Kerry's ministry as a vicar and his role as a Mountain Rescue team volunteer are not lost on him.

"Mountain rescue is all about finding and saving people," he explains. "That's the primary way that Jesus described his own ministry. He often used stories like the Lost Sheep and the Lost Son and there's rejoicing when these people are brought back to God. Being involved in Mountain Rescue is a reflection of that for many people."

Paul, 40, is a volunteer member of Wasdale Mountain Rescue Team (MRT) – acting as the Wellbeing Lead and supporting the resilience and mental health of volunteers and their families. One of those he's there to help is Phil Hall, a Duty Team Leader with the MRT and a member of his congregation at St Bridget's Moresby.

Paul, who is also the vicar at St Andrew's Mirehouse, joined the team after the tragic death in 2019 of a local man who fell while descending Scafell Pike.

"This was my first exposure to Mountain Rescue because the bereaved family asked for a small memorial in Parton and, in time, to have his ashes interred in the churchyard," Paul reflects.

"I saw something of the profound effect mountain rescue has on families, even in times of great grief. The outcome for this man was tragic but the work of the Mountain Rescue Team brought his family great comfort at the time and subsequently."

Paul went on to answer a call for new members and, after interview and assessment, was accepted as a probationer in 2022. He was a hill-going member for two years – attending about 60 call-outs – but has since taken on the wellbeing role.

"When I came for interview, I was amazed by the facilities the team had and their commitment and service," Paul says. "I felt very much at home among them. In my role as a vicar, a lot of my work is done on my own, but mountain rescue is absolutely team orientated. That has been a blessing for me."

"People at church understand this is an

By Dave Roberts

important part of ministry and service, so they are happy that occasionally things have to be moved in the diary because of a call-out."

Paul has been able to draw alongside Phil, 47, who has been a team member for nearly 10 years as well as working as a mechanical engineer at Sellafield.

Last year, the pair featured in a More4 series – *Lake District Rescue* – with cameras welcomed into St Bridget's to film Paul christen two of the children Phil has with his partner, Steph Kelly.

Since joining the church, Phil and his family have become key and loved members. The children are in Sunday school and youth Bible groups, and the parents attend a home group. They help out with various aspects of church life, from building maintenance to baking and organising rock-climbing trips.

"There are some people who look to join our team for personal gratification or development which is fine," says Phil. "For me it's an opportunity to train, work and socialise with friends who I highly admire."

"I'm amazed to watch team members return from a call-out when a storm is still raging. They are soaked to the skin and exhausted but after a few hours' kip they are ready to go back out there. For me it's a calling, it's part of me, it's who I am, and I get great satisfaction from it."

"Obviously there are difficult times, but I'm a talker and I use that to process things. Regardless of the outcome of any call-out, the team always comes together. I speak to a lot of family members who tell me they have had huge comfort from all we've done for a loved one. For me, it's about loving your fellow man."

Wasdale is one of 10 Mountain Rescue teams in Cumbria with a further mines rescue team as well as a search dog team. There are about 50 operational hill-going team members at Wasdale, with a further support network. Members come together for weekly training sessions every Monday as well as gentler 'Wednesday Night Wanders' and



In safe hands: Volunteers descending from Great Gable after a call-out

social evenings on Fridays. Both men say their Mountain Rescue team involvement helps feed their faith.

Paul concludes: "There may be situations where you find yourself stretched to the limit. In turn that leads you to prayer. There's also something about being out on the fells which makes people feel able to open up more readily than they would if you were together in a Bible study, for instance."

"My sense is that, within Mountain Rescue, people generally have a greater sense of the spiritual. That comes both from the awe and beauty of the fells and their desire to serve."

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'People come in to have a selfie taken with Jesus'



Intriguing: Peter Barnes with his unusual interpretation of Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting

DAVE ROBERTS

WITH a church as big as Holy Trinity Kendal you need to ensure any sculpture that is displayed is not 'lost' in the sacred space.

So, an imposing 4-metre-wide sculpture depicting the Last Supper certainly fits the bill.

It is the work of sculptor Peter Barnes and has been at the church for five months, attracting much interest, with the artist also having led two talks about the work and his career. The inspiration behind it is the famous Leonardo Da Vinci painting.

Peter explained: "There are special paintings which, for me, have particular resonance and which I have decided to interpret as 3D models.

"I wanted to challenge myself to reproduce such beautiful paintings as sculptures.

"The Last Supper is one of them. Prior to this work I had worked on life-like interpretations of paintings, but the sheer scale of this work meant it had to be abstract."

Having retired at the age of 45, Peter was able to invest time in his love of art and music, completing workshops and creating an art studio at his home.

The Last Supper was a labour of love completed over a number of years.

Initially, Peter worked on a maquette – a small-scale model of the work –

By Dave Roberts

before then intricately carving a huge block of artist's polystyrene to the form of the sculpture. This was then coated with acrylic resin before being coated with wax and then a fibreglass shell, producing a mould which could be recast. The final work was reinforced with timber.

A mosaic pattern across the work is made up of more than 50,000 computer keys.

The 68-year-old, who lives in north Wales, said: "Having settled on the idea of a mosaic I didn't want to follow a traditional route – in other words, broken tiles or glass. I didn't want any colour in the sculpture. I looked at a computer keyboard and realised there was a bunch of small square tiles and that using them would be a novel idea.

"I sourced thousands of keyboards and then spent hours and hours, laboriously cutting out the keys, snipping off plastic and collecting all the different keys in individual buckets and containers. It meant I could introduce intricate patterns and symbolism into the work as well as exploring the idea of a word search in the sculpture."

The sculpture has been displayed in churches and cathedrals across the country including Chester, Windsor,

Cirencester, Leominster Priory and Dorchester Abbey.

Peter transports it on a car and trailer and uses a roller system to move it into buildings.

The Rev Shanthi Thompson, vicar of Holy Trinity, said: "It arrived in November as a bit of a surprise. We were expecting it at Easter, but Peter could not get it into the church where he had taken it to so he rang up and asked if he could bring it here.

"People who have been in the church have been delighted, fascinated, intrigued and moved by the sculpture.

"The visitors' book is filled with lovely comments about it and we've really encouraged the engagement of children.

"We've given them worksheets and invited them to explore the sculpture and write about what they find.

"There's something incarnational about the work, perhaps because it is life size. There are quite a few people who have gone up to have a selfie taken with Jesus!"

It is the latest in a series of planned art exhibitions in the church. There have already been displays of calligraphy and icons, and there's to be a further exhibition of female artists' work.

Shanthi adds: "We have an amazing space here which we're always keen to make the best use of and attract people in."

Huge sculpture of the Last Supper pulls in the crowds



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Traditional? Pioneering? Both have much to offer

By Dave Roberts

IT'S been a busy morning at St Mary's Westfield with 62 cooked breakfasts having been served to those who dropped in at the Warm Welcome Café.

When I arrive, the Rev Sharon Murphy and a team of volunteers are chatting through how things have gone over a cuppa before they start cleaning up.

The café is one of many examples of social action which the church is engaging with in support of people in Workington.

"I have always been interested in how traditional church and Fresh Expression or pioneering church can be bridged," says Sharon, Pioneer Priest in Charge of St Mary's. "Both have a lot to offer each other. If you can get really good communication going, then it can be a blessing to everybody."

To enable that at St Mary's, social action is at the heart of Sharon's ministry. The mum of eight (and grandparent to nine) was a nurse in Essex for 20 years, working alongside people battling addictions. After that she worked with the Message Trust in Manchester for eight years, basing herself on an estate with high levels of deprivation where she led a team, evangelising the love of Jesus to families and young people.

In 2011, she became a church youth co-ordinator before following a call to ordination and completing an MA at St Hild's College. Her three-year curacy took her to Derwent Oak in Derby – a Fresh Expression church in a deprived area where she again drew alongside those on the margins. She led that community for 18 months.

Sharon recalls: "Derwent Oak was an incredible place where we saw Jesus do quiet things in people's lives that make all the difference. Many of these people felt like they were nothing and that they'd been forgotten; yet here was Jesus moving among them. I saw heads lifted."

Sharon has been involved for more than 20 years with national Christian drug education charity, Hope UK. She is a trained voluntary drug educator, having previously worked for them and been a trustee.

"I think it's vital people are listened to," she says. "People



Busy: The Rev Sharon Murphy, centre back, with volunteers at the Warm Welcome Café

DAVE ROBERTS

Sharon's using social action to build bridges

need to know they are valued and have things to offer. When someone is struggling with addiction, there's so much shame and that pulls people down. But if you have a community of people who are loving towards you and not against you, and where Jesus is at the centre, then life can get better. I wonder if people start to understand how much God loves them?"

Sharon and her husband, John, arrived in Workington 18 months ago. Since then, she's overseen the creation of a new worshipping community – a weekly after-school club through which children have a two-course meal and enjoy Bible-related activities. There's also the weekly Warm Welcome Café, a community choir, a community garden and a monthly Fresh Expression of church at a nearby retirement complex.

She adds: "Quite a few of the people who came to our Monday and Wednesday groups are now volunteers and we're also starting to see mums say, 'Can you christen my children?'"

The connection between traditional church and Fresh Expression has also been measured in a growth of the congregation.

Sharon reflects: "We held a Christmas party for the children who are involved with the after-school club at which the puppet team from NISCU told the Christmas story. We had 50 children under 11 there along with 40 adults. I sat in church almost weeping as I watched the kids singing along, watching and taking part."

"At the same time our chef was in the kitchen praying over the food we were to serve. We'd only catered for 50 but everyone who ate had plenty. In fact, there was more than enough and people could take food away with them – what a miracle!"

"We want to see people living a life in all its fullness, the life they're meant to have rather than the life they may have now. We want them to have the life that God wants them to have. We continue to pray that we will see transformed lives."

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Social media: 'It is hard to make that first step'

Q Tell us a little bit about yourself?

A Well, I'm a west Cumbrian, born and bred. I was raised in Ennerdale and, apart from four years at teacher training college in Liverpool, I have lived in the west of the county all of my life. I've been married to Jim for 41 years and we live in Lowca. We have three grown-up sons.

When the boys were little, we joined St Bridget's Moresby, so that they could go to Sunday School there. I was a teacher for 35 years prior to retirement, the majority of those was at the Valley Primary School near Whitehaven.

I love taking photographs, I'm a diarist and I love different ways of communicating. I didn't engage with Facebook until I'd retired, so I was quite ignorant of it and all things social media. I started to dabble in social media to help my husband's catering business. That was seven years ago and it naturally led to me wanting to develop our church's social media presence.

Q What is your role in church?

A I'm our church's Communications Officer. We're a parish of small villages and hamlets, so social media is a really important way of connecting. I also have access to the Lowca, Parton and Moresby Park Facebook pages which means I can be selective and put posts on about our churches which will connect with people.

The pandemic was a watershed for many churches. We were closed for over a year and we had to reconnect with people in new ways. People missed the physicality of the building, so I (together with Paul, our vicar) upped things through Facebook and looked to communicate a lot more through that.

In my role, I write a monthly message sheet and I have a database of church contacts. I'm also the electoral roll officer and I liaise with the person who looks after our website.

Q Why is digital media important for church engagement?

A There's a whole new online community out there and it's up to us to do what we can as churches to connect with that. Currently, we have about 1,300 followers but there's a lot more who access the page who we don't know about. They see what we do and can understand more of what we're about.

Every church is different and so it's important to analyse what it is you want to achieve but ultimately this is about connecting as many people with God as we possibly can. There are different ways to do that. I've found that at St Bridget's we can draw on our historical roots as a



Ruth Barwise: 'There's a whole new online community out there'

ROB HUMPHREYS

■ In our latest Focus on Faith, we meet Ruth Barwise, who is Communications Officer for St Bridget's Moresby

church (we're on a Roman fort site) and that interests a lot of people. People also like to read posts about other people. Obviously, it's important to make sure you've got people's permissions to post about them.

It's important to be regular and consistent so I post every day, twice a day. There's an early morning Thought for the Day which can generate comments like, 'Thank you, I really needed that'. Four days a week our vicar leads an online Bible reading and prayer reflection for 10 or 15 minutes and then the main post for the day is at 6pm. That could be varied content such as 'Churchyard Tales' posts through to church events or something from our archives. People love to look at photographs. I also try to share lots of other content, but it needs to be local. If you analyse our figures most of those engaging are very local.

Q What challenges are there for a church looking to engage further with social media?

A Often the first thought from people about social media is that it's bad. Maybe they've had a negative

experience with it. So, it's important to try to encourage that engagement by asking simple questions such as 'Did you see the photographs about the Remembrance displays on Facebook?'. It can be difficult for people to make that first step.

I also think there could be people who do engage with Facebook but don't talk about it as they think it's just something for younger people. Well, we have a 96-year-old man who came to it during the pandemic, plus lots of other older people. They readily engage with our content, writing comments on posts and are very positive.

Q What successful social campaigns have you run?

A The current church was built in 1822 so we knew we had our 200th anniversary coming up but it was during the pandemic. We decided to pencil in events and say, 'With faith these will happen'. The anniversary services started things off in January and people were able to come together for various events during the year. We were able to run polls asking people what their

favourite hymns were for a Songs of Praise, we had a knitted Bible display and we also celebrated marriage through the decades at St Bridget's, displaying a dress worn in church for every decade from 1939 onwards and collected more than 100 photos of weddings over the years. Lots of people were able to come and enjoy that. Social media really helped to bring that community together. Those events would not have been half as successful if it hadn't been for Facebook!

Q What is your prayer for your ministry?

A I think it would be that churches have the confidence to have a bigger social media presence in their ministry and that they can find a way that is comfortable for them to show how God is working in their parish and that, ultimately, the online community – engaging with that content – will be able to draw closer to God.

■ Follow St Bridget's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/stbridgetschurchmoresby>.