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# Norwich minister’s miracle stroke healing

Norwich Methodist Circuit minister **Rev Sharon Willimott** has spoken of the miraculous healing she experienced recently after suffering a debilitating stroke. **Helen Baldry** reports.

Sharon, a minister in the Norwich Methodist Circuit, had been preaching on the morning of April 11. Later in the day, just before 4pm she felt unwell. She thought it was vertigo at first, so told herself to relax, as it will pass. Sharon said: “It didn’t pass. I recognised that I was having a stroke and I thought ‘this is very bad’. I lost sensation on my left side, my face dropped, my speech was slurred. It was classic stroke symptoms.” The stroke diagnosis was later confirmed at the Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital with an MRI scan, and doctors were concerned that Sharon might have a bleed on the brain.

Lying in hospital on an acute ward, with her husband Kevin by her side, Sharon believed that their lives, as they knew them, had gone. She said: “I felt my life of ministry had ended and I gave it back to the Lord. I felt despondent and desolate.”

Kevin took Sharon’s diary and began phoning people to arrange cover for her appointments, and also to ask people to pray. The Methodist circuit is clearly alive and well in Norfolk, because people were praying for Sharon up and down the county from Attleborough to North Walsham to Cromer and beyond. Kevin rang another friend who was at Spring Harvest with their 11-year-old god-daughter Roisin, who stood in front of 400 strangers and asked them to pray for Sharon.

In the early hours of Wednesday, something remarkable happened to Sharon.

“I can only describe it as being covered by a blanket of prayer. I have been a minister since 2007 and I never really knew what this meant,” she said.

Sharon was on a ward with some very sick people and she felt that she couldn’t pray for herself, because there were so many people acutely unwell. However, the power of the prayers covering her was overwhelming. She said: “I felt I had to honour what people were doing. I had to join in.”

Sharon then fell asleep for a few hours.



She said: “When I woke up, all the feeling was back in my body.” While all Sharon’s stroke symptoms had gone, her previously existing health conditions remained. Sharon believes that the stroke would have stopped her from ever ministering again, but now she can manage with her other health problems.

Sharon raised her arms and walked around the ward room to show that the symptoms had gone. “The doctors were quite bowled over. I was signed off to go home, with a handshake from the consultant who came in to see me for herself. She said it was miraculous indeed, shook my hand and wished me well.”

Sharon is full of praise for the staff at the Norfolk and Norwich; despite all the pressures of the first day of the junior doctors’ strike, there wasn’t a moment when she felt her care was inadequate.

“One of the therapists at the hospital said it’s a spooky story. ‘Not for a person of faith,’ I said.”

Sharon has had several conversations with people about faith, prayer and what

happened to her and believes this ‘modern miracle’ is worth sharing.

Just days before the stroke, Sharon had been studying John 5 with her Lent group - the story of Jesus at the pool of Bethesda. A multitude of people were sick, but Jesus healed just one, and this is something people always struggle with. Sharon asks: “Of all the people, why did he heal only one? We have to say we don’t know. We can’t know the mind of God.”

Sharon wants to share the power of the blessing, which she describes as “surreal but wonderful” and is raring to go back to work. Grateful for the ‘blanket of prayer’, Sharon plans to knit a physical blanket and sew people’s names on it as a way of marking what has happened.

Since recovering from her stroke Sharon has been appointed as the Lead Chaplain for Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service and is looking to create a network of support across the county. If you are interested in supporting a fire station near you, contact Sharon for more details on 01603 926690 or [sharon.willimott@methodist.org.uk](mailto:sharon.willimott@methodist.org.uk)

## Musician Ben releases his debut single

After losing his twin brother and long term collaborator to cancer in 2016, Norfolk-born Christian singer-songwriter Ben Lawrence began to do the only thing he could, create music.

■ Seven years later, he is releasing his debut album of indie folk songs, exploring themes of grief, loss and hope. His debut single ‘O Wide World’ is available to stream and download now.

Having spent his formative years discovering creativity with his brother Dan, playing in bands and crafting home movies – Ben’s intentions to delve deeper into thought-provoking art continued into his early twenties. But nothing could have prepared them for the tragic event.

After experiencing several seizures in 2014, Dan was diagnosed with a stage four brain tumour. He would go on to receive treatment and during the final year of his life, write and direct a feature length film.

Dan’s passing in late 2016 spun Ben’s life on to a new, unexpected course.

While recovering from the trauma of his brother’s death, Ben began to write his experiences into song.

This time of personal creative healing bore a plethora of songs for Ben, allowing him to explore the depths of grief and the heights of hope. As his life started to pick up a new normal without Dan, the songs lay dormant until in 2020 during the Covid pandemic, Ben’s introspection became a source of connection.

Out of this came the title track to his debut album, ‘O Wide World’, a song about refinding adventure after loss.

Ben said: “This project is the best thing I have ever done, and though borne out of a time of great sadness, I hope it connects with those who are looking for some hope.”

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





## GOOD NEWS

FOR NORWICH & NORFOLK

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■ Editor and designer: Keith Morris  
■ Writers: Helen Baldry, Tony Rothe  
■ Advertising: Helen Baldry 07925 371732  
■ Distribution: Alan Lusher 07743 926884

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■ Website: [www.networknorfolk.co.uk](http://www.networknorfolk.co.uk)

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# Celebrating 650th Julian of Norwich anniversary

This year marks the 650th anniversary of the Shewings of Julian of Norwich with events in Norwich and further afield marking the occasion.



Holy Mother Wisdom  
by Caroline Mackenzie



## Julian lectures

■ Starting in August a series of lectures will explore Julian and her work. Julian Lecture Series, first Saturdays of the month, 11am  
■ **Saturday, August 5**  
Julian of Norwich's Shewings: A Book That Nearly Failed - Dr Juliana Dresvina, History Faculty, University of Oxford. At St Julian's Church live stream. This talk suggests looking at Julian's project as somewhat of a failure in her day, yet something that became more resonant with the early modern audience.  
■ **Saturday, September 2**  
When Margery Met Julian: Writing Visionary Women back into History - Mary Sharratt, author. Streamed live on Zoom. Julian of Norwich and her contemporary Margery Kempe were mystics and literary pioneers who were nearly erased from history. Their iconic books languished in obscurity for centuries and only resurfaced in the twentieth century.  
■ **Saturday, October 7**  
Feminism, Scholarship & Medieval Women's Writing - Dr Sarah Salih, Reader in Medieval English, King's College London. At St Julian's Church and live streamed. Julian of Norwich, included in her early Short Text a rousing, proto-feminist defence of her right to speak; yet omitted the passage from the revised Long Text. The relevance of feminist readings of a woman writer who wrote of the motherhood of God is self-evident.  
[www.julianofnorwich.org](http://www.julianofnorwich.org)

“For lay people like Julian, teaching theology was punishable by a most hideous death of burning at the stake in nearby Lollard's Pit. There was no precedent for such writing in English by a woman.  
“Julian wrote the first book by a woman in English and her writing continues to surprise, baffle and delight. She thought it was worthwhile to ask God how He could possibly claim that ‘All shall be Well’ and the response was ‘Love is the Meaning’.  
“And so we asked modern artists to look again at her writings and go back to the beginning, to visualise her pictures for a modern audience. Over 40 artists from several different countries have responded.”  
A special programme invites visitors to engage with the work through a Family Arts and Crafts day on October 26, during half term. There will also be exciting workshops to try new skills from pottery to foraging for colour.

## Julian concert

■ A Marvellous Melody of Endless Love  
A concert by the Julian Players  
Sunday October 29, 1pm  
Venue: Music Room, Assembly House, Theatre Street, NR2 1RQ, Norwich  
Includes Biber, Bach, Brahms and more, with violin, piano, mandolin, soprano.



# Baptism of fire for church pastor and fireman Dan

There was a baptism of fire for Sheringham church pastor **Daniel Ward** when he decided to take on a role as a retained firefighter during the hottest summer the country has ever seen last year. **Tony Rothe** reports.

**D**aniel is one of the ministers at Lighthouse Community Church in Sheringham, but also finds time to be a retained fireman in Cromer, where he lives, in his spare time. At Lighthouse, he is part of the leadership team, sometimes preaching or leading Sunday services, and assisting the senior leader. He is also project manager of two of the church's major community initiatives – Sheringham Shed, part of the Men's Shed movement, and Priory Patch – a community allotment.  
However, last year, Daniel decided to apply to become a retained fire-fighter with Cromer Fire Brigade. “I have an urge to serve my local community – to give something back,” he explained, “Because of my work at Lighthouse, I have always felt involved with Sheringham, but not so much with Cromer, where I live, and this

seemed an ideal away to connect with the community there. I was sure the work would be rewarding, even potentially fun and, let's face it, firefighters are usually well liked!”  
So is there any problem reconciling these two aspects of his life? Daniel explained that there is a surprisingly good fit between the two, as difficult situations can occur in both jobs and firefighting tends to make you more confident, especially under stress. It can also help with people skills, for example engaging with people in distress.  
“But it also works the other way,” said Daniel. “My work with Lighthouse, and especially my faith in Jesus, is really important when dealing with unpleasant or even perilous situations when firefighting, for example body retrieval or dealing with bereaved relatives.  
“My faith helps me to comfort and reassure people in those situations, and even helps in my relationship with my colleagues at the station.”  
Daniel's role at Cromer fire station started in quite a dramatic, and certainly demanding, way as the hottest day of 2022 occurred within a month of him joining the brigade. Fires were starting all over the county at an alarming rate because of

the heat, and Norfolk Fire Service declared a state of emergency. Every appliance in the county was in use for those few days – the service even borrowed fire tenders from a local museum to transport water!  
“Each job can take anywhere between 30 minutes and four hours,” explained Daniel, “but on the hottest day last year, we started at 3am and I think finished just before midnight! One of the big jobs we had that day was spent successfully saving a house in Stibbard which was surrounded by a field fire. And of course we were wearing our thick, heavy personal protective gear in all that intense heat! You could almost say it was a baptism of fire!”  
Daniel's lifestyle certainly keeps him busy as, with wife, Amy, they have three young children – Phoebe, Judah, and Toby. He says it helps that his boss, Lighthouse senior leader Ian Savory, is happy for him to be absent to perform his firefighting duties, as he sees it as one of the ways in which the church contributes to the community.  
And what of the future? “Well, I'm sure God has a plan for my life,” said Daniel, “And at the moment, I feel that firefighting is part of that plan. We'll have to see what the future holds.”

## Book fair set to feed the minds

■ The annual Feed the Minds book fair in Norwich is set to run once again at St Andrew's Church from July 13 to 15 to support a training project in Sierra Leone, continuing a 50-year tradition.  
Norwich volunteers, led by Waltraud Jarrold, will run the fair at St Andrew's Church, St Andrew's Street, Norwich. It will run from 10am to 4.30pm apart from Saturday when it is 10am to 3pm with a silent auction at 12 noon.  
Organiser Jonathan Piesse said: “Funds raised will go first of all towards the promotion of literacy, but extra funds will go towards the part of the project which provides training in information communication technology in the Bombali district of Sierra Leone for 500 out-of-school young people (400 girls, 100 boys).  
“Feed the Minds is a charity which seeks to improve the material and spiritual lives of communities across the world, through education and the promotion of adult literacy.  
“The focus of the charity is now on education in a broader sense, and involves the promotion, through partner organisations, of projects in which learners gain skills with a relevant purpose. Most of these are in low income places in Majority World countries,” said Jonathan.  
[www.feedtheminds.org](http://www.feedtheminds.org)

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Horstead Centre, Old Rectory, Rectory Road, Horstead, Norwich NR12 7EP  
Registered Charity 303986



# Papal honour for outstanding lady

The outstanding charitable service of a Norwich Catholic has been recognised by **Pope Francis** who has awarded **Angela Stone** a Benemerenti Medal.

The medal was presented to Angela by Bishop of East Anglia the Rt Rev Peter Collins during morning Mass at St John’s Cathedral on Sunday May 7, the day after King Charles III was crowned, himself promising “not to be served but to serve” and encouraging more people to volunteer in their local communities.

In his homily, Bishop Peter referred to the King’s coronation pledge and said: “Today we celebrate the great service rendered by a parishioner of this cathedral parish. Today we honour a woman who has provided an outstanding example of charitable service.

“In her professional life as a nurse, her mind and heart recognised and addressed the needs of the sick and vulnerable. She has extended her hands to offer a loving embrace to those who were abandoned, she has spoken with strength and compassion for those who had no voice.

“She has been an advocate for justice within and beyond the boundaries of the parish and the diocese. The Lord will recognise her fingerprints upon projects across the locality and across the globe,”

said Bishop Peter.

“However, you will hear no trumpeting of her work from her own lips, indeed, she covers her tracks with deliberate care.

“She suffered the untimely loss of her beloved husband and courageously embraced the parental responsibility of nurturing her three fine teenage sons towards their own maturity.

“Angela’s family life and her professional life have been built by faith, hope and charity. Beyond the duties and responsibilities of home and work, she has expended herself in volunteering to address the needs of so many.

“She has attended to the needs of the outcasts, to those whose home is the street pavement or a prison cell, to those who through necessity are seeking refuge in our midst. She has attended to those isolated in their own homes, to those struggling to make ends meet.

“She has been an outstanding teacher of the faith by word and example because she has set herself close to the Lord,” said Bishop Peter.

“Angela, it is my privilege on behalf of the cathedral parish and on behalf of the entire diocese, to inform you that His Holiness Pope Francis has bestowed upon you the recognition of a Benemerenti Medal.

“The Holy Father bestows this honour in recognition of your humility, your courage, your generosity. May God’s graceful blessing continue to inspire and sustain you in the days ahead.”



Angela Stone after receiving her Benemerenti Medal from Bishop Peter Collins at St John’s Cathedral.

Mannington Hall Charity Day

Sunday 3rd September, 2023 11am to 5pm

In aid of

JOHN AVES EDUCATION PROJECT AND THE MATTHEW PROJECT

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Live Music

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Charity Stalls

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GARDEN ENTRY: Adults - £5 | HOUSE ENTRY: Adults - £2 | Under 16yrs - Free for both

For further information visit [www.matthewproject.org/manningtonhallcharityday](http://www.matthewproject.org/manningtonhallcharityday)

John Aves Education Project

Mannington Estate, Norwich NR11 7BB

THE MATTHEW PROJECT  
Finding hope together

Well behaved dogs on leads are welcome

# Charities’ day set for Mannington Hall

Two Norfolk Christian charities, the **John Aves Education Project (JAEP)** and **The Matthew Project** will be hosting a well-established **Charity Day**, which has now been running for over 40 years, at **Mannington Hall** in Norfolk.

■ Lady Walpole has kindly agreed to open her private house and gardens to the public from 11am to 5pm on Sunday September 3, to help charities to raise vital funds benefiting young people both here in Norfolk and in Bethlehem.

The John Aves Education Project funds young people who live in the Dheishah refugee camp in Bethlehem, to continue their undergraduate studies at Al Quds and Bethlehem universities. The charity was set up in the memory of Revd Canon Dr John Aves who died suddenly in 2004 while volunteering in Dheishah. Over 70 students have been successfully supported to date.

The Matthew Project has been helping people live fuller lives, free from drug and alcohol misuse, for almost 40 years. Their ethos is shaped by a Christian world view and is based in Norfolk. They provide support to young people, veterans, professionals, people in recovery, and family and carers affected by substance misuse.

The 20-acre estate offers walks, trails and beautifully landscaped gardens. The 15th

Century hall will also have both floors available to visit. Activities include arts and crafts, live music, a vintage car exhibition, children’s games play area and activities, plant sales plus a fantastic range of refreshments including a BBQ and ice cream. Visitors are encouraged to bring a blanket, relax and enjoy all that the day has to offer.

When asked about this event, Lady Walpole said: “Although we have been holding this event for over 40 years, I still look forward to it because each one is so different. Yet the comments afterwards are so similar referring often to the lovely atmosphere – people of all ages enjoying themselves whilst helping others. It is gratifying to think we must have raised over a million pounds for local charities.”

Sarah King, from the Matthew Project, said: “The day promises to be a wonderful time of fun for all the family. The event is open to the public, so why not join in the fun and get along to support The John Aves Education Project and The Matthew Project so they can continue their lifesaving work.”

For more information visit: [www.matthew-project.org/manningtonhallcharityday](http://www.matthew-project.org/manningtonhallcharityday)

Mannington Hall Charity Day, Sunday September 3, 11am to 5pm Entry.

Garden Entry: Adults £5 | House Entry: Adults £2 | Under 16s Free for both

Well behaved dogs on lead welcome.

Mannington Hall, Norwich, NR11 7BB [www.manningtongardens.co.uk](http://www.manningtongardens.co.uk)

# Rev Hardware serves in church and shop

Norfolk church minister **Andrew Bevan** is known locally as “Rev Hardware” because he also runs a DIY store and garden centre in Brundall with his wife **Alison**. **Tony Rothe** reports.

Rev Andrew Bevan is the Assistant Priest for Stalham and Smallburgh Benefices but, along with Alison, he has run the garden centre for 18 years and, for the second time running, the business was a finalist in the Broadland and South Norfolk Business Awards earlier this year, nominated in the Broadland Retailer of the Year category.

Andrew gained his nickname “Rev Hardware” from some of the local boating community. Before he was selected for ministry training, Andrew had been actively involved in youth and children’s work in the Waterside Benefice. He says: “My motivation was to help reach out to the community and encourage those without a church connection to see the church building and church community in a new and fun light.”

As a self-supporting minister working in his own business, he is allowed to be seen as a priest working in the heart of the community. This helps to break down barriers and to challenge the perception that the priest or church member is only accessible within the confines of the church building. Andrew feels that this is not the reality for many hardworking ministers but can be the perception of those who do not have regular engagement with the church.

“Working in a shop in a semi-rural location, I engage with many hundreds of people each day,” he explains. “These may be regular customers or visitors to the area. To be served by someone wearing a dog collar can at first be quite challenging. My regular customers are now used to this and will frequently spend time talking to me about matters of concern seeking prayer for themselves or family members. Many customers feel able to speak to me when perhaps they would not seek out the local parish priest.”

Andrew wears his clergy collar at work, and both he and Alison make themselves available to be a listening ear to those who visit the shop. He explains: “Very often we will put a cup of tea in someone’s hand if they need a bit of comforting support or take them home if they are struggling with their shopping. Our shop has always tried to convey a welcoming environment.”

For holidaying visitors to the shop, the experience of being served by a priest can be unique and can open up many unusual



Rev Andrew Bevan in his DIY and garden store.

conversations, particularly when speaking with those of other faiths or no faith. He has also had the opportunity to signpost people to the local church or an appropriate support agency.

“My day is varied, given the nature of the shop, and I may find myself assisting a customer in unblocking a drain or toilet one minute and then the conversation moves to matters of personal concern, health issues, emotional fears and concerns.

“Sometimes these conversations can be in the vernacular, as those speaking to me may see through the image of a priest and just wish to express their emotions in the simplest of terms. There is still an understanding, even if someone is not a Christian, that they will be heard by someone wearing a dog collar. It’s about both trust and accessibility.”

Andrew says that there are many Christians who serve faithfully in their communities and his role is no different, as he is just allowed to be a visible Christian presence in an unusual environment. It is a non-threatening environment, with no barriers to access.

“My key motivation is to work in the community, to be part of the community, to be an accessible priest and to break down some of the misconceptions about what the church is. By doing so I would hope to permit others to be comfortable in hearing of God’s love for them.”

“I feel called to help in taking the church into the community and breaking down some of the perceived barriers at the church door. When serving on a Sunday I always try to be outside welcoming our congregations before the service starts. My business activities help to place me in the community,” said Andrew.

# Summer holidays are chance for photos

The summer holiday season brings the opportunity for lots of photos, and Jane Walters explains why God’s photo-editing can be such a blessing.



■ I love photos – and not just photos of people I love and places I’ve been. No, I am that person who will cheerfully look through other people’s albums or, more likely, watch them on the TV. I think my record was to sit through three hours of a friend’s holiday snaps. To be fair, they had been to the Himalayas.

I’ve recently been introduced to the delights of Google Photos. Now, I no longer have to say – with some degree of exasperation – “Oh, those ones are on my iPad, not my phone”. All my photos are on all of my devices; but that is not all. Every day, the app prompts me to remember a particular day or a particular person by creating a collage set to music. Clever, eh?

I remember someone being interviewed about their late father. As you’d expect, they spoke of the occasions they wish he could still have been part of; but then added, “and all the ones I’m glad he missed”. Not everything in life is worthy of whipping the camera out and recording. In fact, I have occasionally wished there was an ‘anti-camera’ – a tool that positively made you forget the painful things.

Here’s where God comes in. To deal with the damage and ache of wounds we have inflicted on others and have received ourselves, He offers forgiveness. How’s about this for a statement? ‘He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west’ (Psalm 103:12). Or this one, ‘And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins’ (Jer. 31:34).

If you like, God is the ultimate photo editor: showing our happy times in glorious colour while skilfully, gently, removing what spoils them. It’s not too late to let Him start.

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# Gill takes readers on a time-travelling journey

Retired Norfolk nurse **Gill Parkes** takes young readers back in time on an adventure to learn about Bible stories and to discover who God is in their lives today. **Helen Baldry** reports.



■ Gill has always wanted to write and started during lockdown with her six grandchildren in mind. Two years on, and Gill has published a series of books for 7 – 11 year olds centred around a boy called Sam who is taken back in time, with the help of a strange stone found on a Norfolk beach, when he encounters characters from the Bible. Gill said: "I really like time travel books. The idea was to teach the kids stories of the Bible, which a lot of kids don't get to hear any more. I wanted to link it to today as well as it seemed like a good way of doing it." Gill self-published the books, which are available on Amazon. She said: "I couldn't decide what colour to do the cover. As I was praying about it God said 'write a rainbow' – and I thought that's seven!" There are now seven books in the Sam Parrow time travel series – ranging from purple to red. The series centres around 12-year-old Sam Parrow, who is bullied because he is small. He doesn't have many friends, but goes back in time to Bethlehem and makes a friend called Rachel. The pair of them travel backwards and forwards in time, and the storyline links to what's going on for Sam back home as well. There are factual elements to each book; such as a recipe for unleavened bread and another for lentil stew. In the middle book, Sam time-travels to Noah's Ark, and that chapter contains information about the Dodo. There is also a Hebrew pictograph and code-breaker in book three. Gill delights in writing stories and finds it easy to imagine life from a child's perspective. "My name even means youthful or childlike!" she says. She believes that God has asked her to teach children and was once involved in a youth group for ages 11 – 13. She came to faith herself aged 15 after being invited to a really good youth group. Along with her husband Martin and three young children, Gill was a missionary in Darwin in Australia for Wycliffe Bible Translators working with Aborigines. The couple currently live in Sheringham and attend a home church. They used to be involved at Beacon in Bacton, which is where she was living when she wrote the books. Gill has given many of the books away via local churches and friends, and also put them in phone box libraries around Norfolk. Gill's hope is that many readers will join Sam on his time-travel journey of discovery, learning about fear, forgiveness, friendship and love - and finding that God himself is the ruler of time. For copies of the book, search on Amazon for "Gill Parkes Sam Parrow" or email Gill at: [timestonebooks@gmail.com](mailto:timestonebooks@gmail.com)

# King Charles honours inspiring Norwich couple

Norwich couple **David and Ruth Southgate** were presented with MBEs at Buckingham Palace recently for their work over more than 50 years in building a city church, running community projects and raising over £65,000 for numerous charities with the Meadow Way Orchestra. **Keith Morris** reports.

**D**avid, 82, and Ruth, 79, of Hellesdon, founded Meadow Way Chapel in May 1971 and builder David literally constructed it on land near their own home on Reephham Road, with the help of others. Well-known in the community for running their shop Cards n Things, as well as numerous community projects, the couple received their MBEs together from the Princess Royal in an investiture ceremony in the Throne Room at Buckingham Palace in early March, watched by their four sons. A couple both receiving honours together is a very unusual occurrence, only happening once every couple of years and a special video was made to mark the occasion by the palace team. "We thought the emails from the Cabinet Office were a scam at first," said Ruth. "Being recognised and honoured in such a way had never entered our heads. David said: "Ruth is probably the driving force and comes up with the ideas. But we always work closely together and complement each other well. God has called us to do these things, practical things, which sometimes, non-Christians find hard to understand. Ruth said: "It is a partnership and we each do some things on our own as well. To get the award at all was something we had never dreamt of. You see there's a need and, with our Christian faith, you get a vision to help." David added: "You don't dream of getting an MBE. What we do just comes naturally. "We do what we do for the community because we love doing it." "On the day of the investiture, I remember being slowly driven down The Mall by one of our sons, going through security and the big Palace gates," recalls Ruth.



After joining a queue, the couple were ushered into the Throne Room where their sons and their wives were ready to watch the ceremony. David and Ruth were greeted by the Princess Royal and had their medals pinned on by her. Ruth said: "She was so kind, she mentioned Colman's Mustard and referred to the chapel we had built with our team. There was a music ensemble playing music in the background, some of which we played in the orchestra, which I mentioned to the Princess and told her about the fundraising." Most appropriately, the ensemble played Nobody Does It Better by Carly Simon while the couple were receiving their medals. "The music was just the icing on the cake," said Ruth, who also mentioned to the Princess Royal that two of their daughters-in-law Helen (a coach) and Sue (a volunteer), who were watching on, are involved in the charity Riding for the Disabled, which the Princess was very pleased to hear as she is its president. "We are here to thank you for all you have done, the Princess said to us," recalled Ruth. In a personal video of their investiture, King Charles says: "I think one of the most important things is to be able to reward in a suitable way the selfless service and dedication of so many of these remarkable people for the marvellous things they have done." William, the Prince of Wales, says: "When talking with the recipients at these investitures, I am reminded of all the great things they have done to earn their rewards, the long service they have given, the considerable achievements they have reached and the selfless commitments they have made to their communities." Anne, the Princess Royal says: "I hope that the example set by these naturally generous and determined people will not be underestimated and that they will have enjoyed the experience of today." David and Ruth finished off their special day with afternoon tea at a nearby hotel with all their sons and daughters-in-law and four generations of the family. But although the couple are taking things a bit easier these days, they are still fully occupied. Last spring Meadow Way Chapel transitioned into part of Gateway Vineyard, under the leadership of former Meadow Way members Marc and Katie Lillystone. "We are very pleased with how it has all gone now," said David, who admitted it was difficult letting go of "my baby". The orchestra is still going strong, although David had a medical incident in 2018 while conducting the orchestra during a Christmas concert and had to go to hospital. He subsequently had to step back from the role, but David and Ruth are delighted that a former school head of music in Reading, Bernard Soper, is now the conductor. A further project which the couple hope to see completed, through the recently registered Hawthorne Meadow Trust, is the building of four retirement bungalows on ground next to the Chapel.



# Norwich saxophonist launches Jazz Ensemble

**David Fitzgerald** has many years of experience as an international musician, teacher and director of ensembles. He has now added a Jazz Ensemble to his range of learning opportunities for the people of Norfolk – called JazzWorld.

■ David is one of the most inspiring teachers in Norfolk. Under his encouraging tuition and professional guidance, many students have gone on to pursue their own careers in music. "My purpose," says David, "is to equip pupils with good practical skills as well as to assist them to discover a deeper understanding and appreciation of music." "I consider my role as a music teacher to be an honour and a privilege. It is a God-given blessing to be able to pass what has been given to me, from the very finest of teachers and colleagues (and years of experience), over to those on the threshold of their journey."

David began his studies (at the age of 15) at the prestigious Royal Marines School of Music in Deal, Kent. His first appointment was in the Far East (based in Singapore for two years), as principal Flute, Piccolo and Saxophone in Her Majesty's Royal Marines Band. He performed with HMRRMB across the Far East and Pacific. Back in the UK he took regular part in royal and state occasions such as the Trooping of the Colour, Royal Tournament and Edinburgh Tattoo. After ten years with the HMRRMB, David moved on to play across the world, with theatre companies, pop bands and various jazz and big bands. Following his conversion to the Christian faith, David moved away from secular music to concentrate on international Christian music and worship. Since the early 1980s he has continued to tour and record for BBC Songs Of Praise and with many Christian artists including Graham Kendrick, Adrian Snell, Noel Richards, Sheila Walsh, Stuart Townend, Chris Eaton and Martin Smith. In 1989, he co-founded (with Dave Bain-

bridge) the highly acclaimed musical project Iona and recorded two albums with the band (Iona and The Book Of Kells). Four solo projects followed. David moved to Norwich in 1996 and two years later premiered his joint project with Dave Bainbridge – The Eye of the Eagle at the Norfolk and Norwich Festival, performing in Norwich Cathedral and later broadcast on national television. David offers his past experience to assist his pupils to discover and to reach their potential, to explore and to fully enjoy their own journey in music. In September 2021 he launched a new initiative called SaxWorld. These ensembles have grown and developed quickly. David says: "There is a real sense of community with each of our ensembles. It really helps to have members of all ages, who come to each session with an attitude of mutual encouragement. Each weekly session is a joyful experience, where we learn and move on in our playing, as an ensemble and as individuals". David has now added to his saxophone ensembles an ensemble which is dear to his heart – JazzWorld. "This new ensemble is open to players of saxophone, brass (trumpet and trombone), piano, bass, drums and vocalists," David says. "This ensemble provides an opportunity for aspiring musicians of all ages and ability, to learn about the unique world of jazz and improvisation and to develop ensemble and soloist skills". David continues: "Following many years of experience within the international music world and then directing jazz ensembles at Norwich School (for 20 years), Notre Dame High School, Norfolk Centre for Young Musicians as well as schools in Suffolk and Essex, I felt that it was time to expand and offer the chance for aspiring musicians of all ages and abilities to discover the unique experience and joy of making music with others." Saxworld and JazzWorld take place every Saturday morning during school term time at St Anne's Crossroads Church, Colman Road, Norwich. Email David at [david@davidfitzgerald.co.uk](mailto:david@davidfitzgerald.co.uk) or visit [www.saxworld.co.uk](http://www.saxworld.co.uk)

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# A place of rest

## Norfolk Christian home aims to offer Godly care



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e info@quebechall.co.uk  
w www.quebechall.co.uk



# Retirement homes provide care with a Christian ethos

Care and retirement homes in Norfolk, including Eckling Grange, Corton House and Quebec Hall, are providing loving care with a Christian ethos.

**C**hristian retirement home Quebec Hall at Dereham, in Mid Norfolk, has provided a home for retired Christians for 63 years, the management and staff aim to provide a secure, home-from-home atmosphere coupled with personal care and attention. Above all, they wish the home to be one in which the love of God is readily apparent from the care shown.

The Hall has 19 rooms and all are bright, airy and en-suite. The Hall has two large lounges, one of which features a balcony that affords good views of the gardens and beyond. The lounge on the ground floor is used extensively for the majority of the Hall's activities including the weekly services.

There are also 43 bungalows situated in the grounds of Quebec Hall. The self-contained bungalows are well suited to those who are seeking peace in their later years and who wish to maintain their independence.

For more information visit [www.quebechall.co.uk](http://www.quebechall.co.uk) or contact manager Mark Woodgett on 01362 692504 or via email at: [info@quebechall.co.uk](mailto:info@quebechall.co.uk)

Quebec Hall can be found at Quebec Road, Dereham, Norfolk NR19 2QY.

Founded over 70 years ago upon the Christian ethos of community and kindness, the home has fostered links with local churches over many years. There are regular worship services for those who wish to participate, and the opportunity to receive Communion and pray with the dedicated chaplain.

Hailed as a pioneer in social care back in 1952, Corton House continues to stand for innovation today. One of the cornerstones of this is the home's progressive activities and wellbeing programme, offering something beyond the standard knitting and board games – although there is plenty of time for those too! Corton House regularly partners with specialist arts and culture providers, and has strong community links, allowing plenty of opportunity to socialise and learn something new. Recent examples include British Sign Language taster lessons, clay sculpture-making inspired by local wildlife, and collaborative poetry writing with a local school.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to care at Corton House; each resident is treated as an individual and supported to make their own choices and be as independent as they can be.

The best way to see what Corton House can offer and get a feel for its warm, caring atmosphere is to arrange a tour – just call 01603 620119 or email [manager@corton-house.co.uk](mailto:manager@corton-house.co.uk). [www.cortonhouse.co.uk](http://www.cortonhouse.co.uk)

**E**ckling Grange Christian care home in Mid Norfolk is celebrating 60 years of caring for thousands of residents on July 15

Eckling Grange was officially opened as a Christian care home for retired missionaries in 1963, and since then, the charity has continued to care for the elderly from all four corners of the globe.

General Manager, Stewart Barber, said: "Thousands of residents have lived at the complex and this year we are celebrating God's continued faithfulness, that in 2023 the original aims and aspirations of the charity are still going strong.

"On July 15, we are holding our celebrations and have invited 300 guests covering current residents and families, former trust-

ees, volunteers, folk who have supported the spiritual ministry, contractors past and present and last but not least, our amazing staff, who make all of this possible."

The complex still continues to thrive, providing residential and dementia care, day and respite care, as well as providing 54 sheltered accommodation bungalows. But along with the physical and social care, the spiritual care has developed and grown enormously in the last 10 years.

Eckling Grange now employs both a Lead and Assistant Pastor to guide the spiritual life of the complex covering the residents, their families and the 100 strong



Sheltered accommodation bungalows at Eckling Grange.

staff team. Recently the complex has opened a new lounge on site called the Gatehouse to seat 50 people. This is particularly aimed at supporting those who live in the bungalow complex.

There is also a new 16-seater minibus with full disability access, which is going out weekly, taking residents from the care home or bungalows to various locations around the county.

Visit: [www.ecklinggrange.org.uk](http://www.ecklinggrange.org.uk)

  
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## Nick's 50 years of playing church organ

Nick Walmsley has just completed an impressive 50 years of service as the organist at St Helen's, Hoveton and Our Lady and St Walstan, Costessey, using the talent he believes God has given him, despite health challenges. Josh Clovis reports.

■ There is something uniquely multi-faceted about music, and for Nick, organist and Director of Music at St Helen's Hoveton and Our Lady and St Walstan, Costessey near Norwich, it is much more than just playing notes. Born in Hoveton in April 1960, opposite the then-new St Helen's Catholic church, Nick's spiritual and musical paths have been entwined ever since he was the second baby baptised at that church and, at the extraordinarily young age of 12, when he became the first organist of the church, a role he has held continuously ever since.

Nick honed his skills at the Paston School in North Walsham, and first played at Belough St Peter, an Anglican church close to home, in September 1972. His musical talent encouraged the clergy at St Helen's to start sung Masses, accompanied by Nick and an old reed organ. It was a small but significant start to what would be a lifelong dedication to church music.

In 1979, a new pipe organ, built in the Baroque style, was installed at St Helen's. This was the first of its kind in the UK, marking another milestone in Nick's journey as a church musician. "My dedication is two-fold: I've been given a specific talent and that talent should be used in the service of God, whether leading congregations in singing, or trying to the best of my ability to lift their emotions with the solo music in the Mass. It sounds glib, but it is what any church musician must do," says Nick.

His association with the organ is not merely about



Nick Walmsley on the organ at St Walstan's earlier this year. Picture by Henry Beddingfield.

duty or devotion, he says it has also served as a healing force amidst his personal struggles with poor health. He reflects: "Having had a life-long chronic illness, I find playing the organ has a relaxing and healing effect – I've not missed many Sundays in 50 years, despite frequent hospitalisation and operations in the early days. It is the one thing that has kept me going."

Nick's musical journey extends beyond the borders of East Anglia. He has been a guest artist at the Valletta Festival of History and Elegance in Malta and has performed live on Radio Malta. His international performances include playing the famous 'Bamboo Organ' at Las Piñas, and the 18th-century organ at San Agustin in Intramuros, Manila, in the Philippines.

Not just a player, but also a composer, Nick is known for his skill in improvisation. His work has been broad-

cast on the BBC and he was awarded the Diocesan Medal for Services to Music and the Liturgy in 2019.

The ability to convey feelings through his music, as he describes, is a unique part of his performances. "There are times when you feel like a lightning conductor – on those occasions the Spirit moves – and he does! – and something takes over, so you merely channel it, like a form of prayer. What I'd find hard to express in words, I can in music," he explains.

Nick's story is an inspiring one of a journey of resilience and devotion. His life is a testament to the power of music in uplifting the spirit, serving a higher purpose and overcoming personal trials. From a church opposite his birthplace to the far corners of the world, he has carried the message of harmony and hope through his talent, faith and dedication.

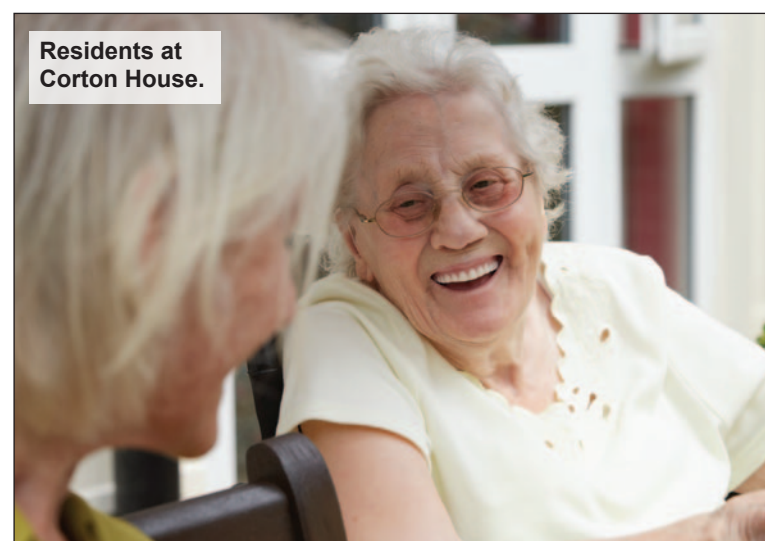


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Residents at Corton House.



# Celebrate

## Norwich & Norfolk

Highlighting the work of the Norwich & Norfolk Christian community

### Norfolk Healing Rooms has faith for our times

Norfolk Healing Rooms (HRs) provide free ministry for healing in body, mind and spirit. Norfolk HRs also run Norfolk School of Prophets (NSOP) and Prophetic Intercessors at NSOP.

■ The ministry of Norfolk HRs, directed by Revs Ray and Ruth Scorey, rests firmly on the promise of Isaiah 53:4-5, which states that we are not just saved, but healed; it's a finished work of the cross.

Ray says: "We are called to heal the sick in the power, name and authority of Jesus. Since we opened in 2007 we've seen wonderful physical healings with eyesight, fractures, pain, cancer and infertility, not to mention emotional and spiritual healings."

HRs were inspired by John G Lake in 1914 in Spokane, USA, which saw 100,000 documented healings over a five-year period. Cal Pierce re-dug the wells of healing there in 1999 and the International Association of Healing Rooms (IAHR) now has over 3,000 centres in over 80 countries. They have a vision to see at least one HR in every city across the world. The first HR in the UK opened in Halifax in 2003. Norfolk HR began in 2007. There are now over 70 HRs in the UK and expansion continues.

Ray and Ruth have been Regional Directors of HRs in the East of England for six years and became National Advisors to HRs Scotland in 2019. HR team members are spirit-filled Christians from a variety of denominations. They are thoroughly trained and regularly kept up-to-date with healing ministry. Norfolk HRs welcome to the team any Spirit-filled Christian with a heart for healing.

Ministry with Norfolk HRs is free (donations always welcome) via Zoom, telephone and WhatsApp with additional face-to-face sessions at various locations coming soon.

Web: [healingrooms.org.uk/healing-rooms-near-you](http://healingrooms.org.uk/healing-rooms-near-you)

Email: [norfolk@healingrooms.org.uk](mailto:norfolk@healingrooms.org.uk)

Tel: 07900 341 287

Norfolk HRs do introductory talks for Christian organisations interested in knowing more.

Norfolk HRs are steeped in intercession, all ministry being undergirded by prayer. They also run weekly Zoom intercession meetings for revival and daily midweek groups for Ukraine. So many donations for Ukraine poured into the Norfolk HR bank account that more than £12,000 has already been sent to HRs Kyiv, to support special humanitarian operations over there.

Ray and Ruth run Norfolk School of Prophets and offer free taster sessions in the prophetic, encouraging and inspiring people to hear God more clearly in an interactive and enjoyable way.

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### Conference on how to transform your work

OMF (UK), has teamed up with LICC and Climate Stewards to stage a one-day conference in Manchester this autumn which aims to give inspiration and practical guidance for how the good news of Jesus can transform your work and your workplace.

■ Work&Go is a Christian partnership which wants to see work and lives transformed by the good news of Jesus. Ngaira Smith Workplace Ministries Project Manager at OMF, said: "We seek to inspire, equip and commission you as a follower of Jesus. Affirming that sharing your faith across cultures and having a fulfilling career are not mutually exclusive, in fact, they're made to go together."

"The workplace is more diverse than ever, full of people from different ethnicities, nationalities, and social backgrounds. That means the workplace is where the good news can change cultures when Christians apply Jesus' message to their work."

Tickets, at £59, include a buffet lunch and a selection of hot and cold drinks, pastries and refreshments served throughout the day.

Ngaira said: "Come ready to be equipped to see how your faith can shape and challenge the status quo and impact your community and the world for positive change."

[workandgo.org](http://workandgo.org)

"The day at Park Inn by Radisson in Manchester city centre on Saturday November 4, includes keynote speakers, vocational seminars, and networking opportunities that are sure to help you share Jesus in your workplace," said Ngaira.

"Don't miss out on this incredible opportunity to learn from Christian professionals in a variety of stages in their working careers and connect with like-minded individuals. Get your tickets now and secure your spot at the conference of the year!"

Seminar streams focus on a vocational sector, and are designed to equip delegates to live for Jesus in their sphere of cultural influence from social enterprise to media. Streams include: social enterprises, arts and entertainment, government, digital and media, education, business.

### Norwich resource centre is a revelation

Norwich Christian Resource Centre, known as Revelation, is a unique and special place says Manager Cathy Luland.



Our customers include local, national and world-wide visitors. Many customers from further afield are wowed by the Centre and say they don't have anything like it near them.

"We also have a cafe that provides a wide range of beverages, savoury and sweet pastries, cakes, soups and jacket potatoes. All at very reasonable prices. For example, a filter coffee and Danish pastry only costs £3.80. We have several cakes which are gluten and dairy free. You can enjoy all this in the calm setting of Saint Michael at Plea church or in our beautiful garden in the shade of our parasols."

"We want to encourage more people to come and find out about us, so that our footfall increases in these challenging economic times. We are only a few minutes' walk from the marketplace or St Andrew's car park, so not as far away from the city centre as we might seem, and very

close to Tombland and the Cathedral.

"But Revelation is much more than this. We have a large range of Christian books including new titles just published, Bibles, gifts, Bible reading materials, cards, jewellery, an extensive section for children and young people and a huge selection of second-hand books and CDs."

"Please tell your Christian friends and church congregation and encourage them to pop along and see what we have to offer. Come and have a browse and spend some time in the atmosphere of our medieval church, enjoying a cuppa and a bite to eat and we hope to see you soon," said Cathy.

Revelation is open Tuesday to Saturday 10am to 4pm (cafe closes at 3pm).

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

### Church at heart of city centre

St Stephen's church, in the heart of Norwich city centre, offers a community café, a thriving church fellowship and a summer arts festival.

The church offers two worship services every Sunday. The 9.15am service is a quieter and more traditional service. The 10.45am service is a little more informal with more modern worship and a children's group during the service. "Both congregations are growing but there is always room for more," says Vicar Rev Canon Madeline Light, "and we promise you a warm welcome if you would like to join us."

"As well as being a worshipping community, we see serving our city, particularly those who are struggling and vulnerable, as central to our church life and so there is so much more to us than Sunday services."

"Our community café serves a variety of light meals, home-made cakes and excellent tea and coffee on Monday to

Saturday between 10am and 3pm, with all profits funding our wider community work within the city. We have a friendly, dedicated band of volunteers who keep the café open, but we are always looking for new volunteers to join the team."

The church has an expanding ministry with toddlers and their carers, using the play area both during café hours and at the Little Fellowes group at St Stephen's Chapel on Fellowes Plain.

The church also has a summer arts festival. For the past couple of years it has welcomed a group of local artists who share their work around a scriptural theme. This year, the Community Festival theme is "Live creatively, friends." (Galatians 6:1, The Message) and will run from September 11 to October 6. For more details, visit: [www.ststephensnorwich.org](http://www.ststephensnorwich.org)



### Charity is a place for new beginnings

The House of Genesis is a Norwich charity, which offers supported accommodation to homeless men, many of whom are ex-offenders.

■ Val Dodsworth founded the charity in December 2000 in her home. With very little in the way of initial resources other than faith and determination she, helped by an ex-offender combined their skills and life experiences to begin the work that has grown into The House of Genesis - a place to make a new start.

Since that time the charity has grown steadily and now uses three properties on the east side of Norwich, with five staff offering supported accommodation for up to 13 men. We are now actively looking for another property in the area to use. Val has recently retired from her position as trustee, but still maintains close contact with the charity."

Genesis offers a comfortable and friendly place to call home for up to two years, giving men the opportunity to become re-established in the life of the community.

Chair of trustees, Alan Lusher, said: "We offer help with everyday things, like getting registered with a doctor and a dentist, help with form filling and applying for benefits.



We link up with many local agencies for services like counselling, help with addictions, establishing family contact, dealing with debts, managing finances and the many other things that crop up from day to day.

"Genesis was founded by Christians with the purpose of providing, not only a home for those without one, but also to express in our daily living the genuine care and concern that we believe God has for every individual. A verse from the Bible that has been an inspiration to us from the beginning is "Remember to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2)."

"There is no expectation that any resident should be a Christian although should a resident express an interest in the faith, we have a chaplain who will help them," said Alan. "We believe that each man who comes to us is a unique individual, made in the image of God and has the potential to live a successful and fulfilling life. It's then our job to help him to find the best within himself and to encourage him to take that way forward in his life."

You can read more about the charity on its website [www.thehouseofgenesis.org](http://www.thehouseofgenesis.org)

### Chaplaincy offers support for ex-offenders

Community Chaplaincy Norfolk (CCN) is a Christian charity which provides Volunteer Mentors for prison leavers of all faiths and none, supporting them to rebuild their lives after prison, as its team explains.

**How does it work?**

■ Based on a model established by national organisation the Community Chaplaincy Association, CCN employs a manager: to recruit, train and support volunteer mentors; to assess potential clients; to liaise with the prison authorities, probation, and other relevant agencies; and to allocate clients to mentors.

We are based at the St Stephen's Church café in Norwich city centre.

"This has been one of the best things I've found to help with rehabilitation...I don't think I would have made it on my own if I'm honest." CCN Client.

**The Client Journey**

■ Our work is not time limited. Once a person has been accepted as a CCN client, a mentor will meet them several times in prison, to build up a relationship and identify the kind of support they will need to achieve their goals.

On the day of discharge, we try to meet each

client at the gate and accompany them to accommodation, probation, or other appointments. This is followed by regular meetings with their mentor to discuss progress and work through any challenges.

"It's just helping that person to walk life's journey, really." CCN Mentor.

**Volunteer Mentors**

■ Our mentors come from a diverse background of life experiences and beliefs.

All mentors undertake an initial training which is followed by additional training and group support sessions. All mentors are also supported by regular one-to-one sessions with the CCN Mentor Coordinator.

We would love to hear from you if you might like to become a Mentor for CCN. You can find more information on our website or contact details below.

**The Wider Community**

■ Norfolk has a rich diversity of services available to help clients with applying for benefits, support agencies for addictions, and opportunities for voluntary positions, positive activities, training, education, or work.

Mentors signpost clients to these agencies and explore options with them. We co-ordinate a quarterly forum for organisations working with people with convictions.

If you are interested in joining the forum or discuss partnership working, please get in touch.

**A Christian ethos – open to all**

CCN is not part of the prison system and, while it is a Christian charity, it is not attached to any one denomination. We welcome clients and mentors of all faiths and none.

■ Website: [www.norfolkchaplaincy.org.uk](http://www.norfolkchaplaincy.org.uk)

Facebook: [communitychaplaincynorfolk](https://www.facebook.com/communitychaplaincynorfolk)

Email: [info@norfolkchaplaincy.org.uk](mailto:info@norfolkchaplaincy.org.uk)

Phone: 07882 288348



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# Ben’s world of football and faith

There is only one thing which German football expert, UEA researcher and podcast presenter Ben McFadyean is more enthusiastic about than the “beautiful game” – and that is his Catholic faith. **Keith Morris** reports.

**P**odcaster Ben, aged 53, has interviewed scores of footballers and managers, including several from Norwich City, for his popular Borussia Dortmund fans podcast and he is the founder and president of the Dortmund supporters club in London.

Norwich-based Ben is a PhD researcher in German football literature at UEA and he lives and breathes football. His diagnosed Asperger’s gives him an edge in remembering the multitude of facts and figures necessary and a keen focus on detail.

But Ben will admit that it is his Catholic faith which is the most important part of who he is and it is what drives him.

Born in England, Ben spent a large part of his childhood in Dortmund in Germany where he acquired a love of the beautiful game, especially Borussia Dortmund and learnt to speak German.

Via Mallorca, Spain, where his family still live, Ben ended up at University College London studying German and after graduating, spent time working in finance and later in charity fund-raising for the Lord Mayor of London, the Red Cross, a refugee project he developed with Oxford United in 2017, and a project with The Big Issue and Southampton FC.

He later spent five months working with Mother Teresa’s Missionaries of Charity with orphans in Ethiopia and volunteering with the chaplaincy at the John Radcliffe Children’s Hospital in Oxford.

A keen charity fund-raiser, Ben’s most recent project was raising £800 for the DEC Earthquake appeal for Turkey/Syria by organising a friendly football match between Chelsea and Dortmund fans in London in February, to coincide with the two teams meeting in the European Champions League.

“Faith has brought me to a place in football and in my life which I would never have expected,” said Ben. “I cannot say I have made lots of money from my writing yet, but I am a fulfilled man and I try to do things for others when I can.”

“God often gives you a natural leaning towards something. Life is so much easier when you follow your calling of what God



Ben McFadyean above (on the right), with Norwich City manager, David Wagner and, left, at the University of East Anglia.

wants you to do.”

Ben’s faith was inspired in his youth by his grandmother Jean who was a churchwarden and it was rekindled when he met his estranged father at the age of 30.

“My father, Francis, was an off-shore banker, made money but developed issues with substance abuse addiction while working on Wall Street in New York,” said Ben. “After he broke his back in a bob-sleigh accident he became a born-again Christian and said it had saved his life.

“He bought me a Bible and I started going to Mass at the Brompton Oratory in London and I realised that there was something special there which was beyond comprehension. It was a bit like the football – it lifted me up and made sense to me – a reverence for something higher. It also reminded me of my grandmother and gave me a sense of peace.

“I found football as a child and played at a decent county standard. I excelled in every kind of sport but could not do maths because I have dyspraxia. Five years ago I found out that I also have Asperger Syndrome, which explains why

I sometimes have difficulties in social interaction.”

Conversely, the Asperger’s has helped Ben with his football journalism: “It has made me brilliant at focusing and given me an encyclopaedic mind and memory for all the important details and stats. It has also given me patience and the ability to give players time in a world which is incredibly pressurised.

Ben writes for FourFourTwo magazine, the BBC, Gulf News and a number of German publications. He has appeared on numerous TV and radio stations in Germany.

A member of the famed Dortmund supporters’ Yellow Wall, Ben’s passion and commitment to promoting the team in the UK has helped to spark the fascination with Dortmund in this country. He has run the London fan club since 2013 and organises tickets, travel details and accommodation for fellow supporters.

Of course Ben’s local club, Norwich City, have a strong German connection with former manager Daniel Farke and current manager David Wagner.

Former Norwich players Timm Klose and Christoph Zimmermann are both Catholic and Christoph regularly attended St John’s Cathedral, where Ben is a parishioner. Ben has interviewed them all.

“The story of German football is one that has not been told properly in the UK,” says Ben. “The integrity of the German football model of cheap tickets and a fantastic atmosphere at grounds, is an authentic football experience. I feel that the Bundesliga is the world’s most authentic football product.

“German players and coaches bring so much to the English game in terms of

their sheer competence and traditional English values such as determination, discipline, hard work and ingenuity.”

Ben also has a great admiration for openly Catholic footballers from countries such as Brazil, Argentina and from Africa, players like Willian, Sergio Aguero or Victor Wanyama: “They are such an example to me because they come from very humble circumstance and make it in football and it is often because of their devotion and love for God.

“You can bring the Gospel to people around you in daily life, whether you are a doctor, a mechanic or a journalist. What has inspired me the most is that I can still be of service to others – taking down someone’s story and writing it with sincerity and devotion and not looking for the scandal, or angle or the distortion that will get it sold to a tabloid paper.

“I am someone who cares about the people I write about and want them to come across in the right way – to tell their story the way they want it told. I am devoted to getting it right and expressing their story and being respectful of them.

“I think there is a reason it is called the ‘beautiful game’ because it breaks down barriers and it can lift people up. It does some of what the church is meant to do. It reaches hearts and minds and inspires and lifts people up even in dark times,” says Ben.

Ben is keen to highlight the role of his faith in his work and life: “Without God I am useless, I am a broken man. But by letting God work through me I can do extraordinary things. I have felt the presence of God in my life very strongly since I found God in 1999.”

Find Ben’s podcast at: [mcfadyean.podbean.com](http://mcfadyean.podbean.com)

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