



Robert helps million orphans find a home

Norwich-based international charity **Care for Children** has placed an incredible one million orphan children into families in China and beyond. **Eldred Willey** reports.

A new book from Hodder and Stoughton – *As Many as the Stars* – tells the story of charity founder Robert Glover, and of how he moved with his wife and six young children from the UK to China to follow his calling.

Robert Glover was a submariner and then a footballer before he settled into a career as a social worker caring for difficult teenagers in Norfolk.

Since childhood he nurtured a dream to visit China and his dream developed into a vision: to help the many children who have been abandoned into orphanages across China as an unintended consequence of the One Child Policy.

He first visited China in 1996, and in 1998 moved to Shanghai with his family and founded the charity Care for Children, which pioneered family placement as an alternative to institutional care. When the charity was launched, there wasn't a word in Mandarin for foster care. In conversations with the Chinese government Robert demonstrated that family-based fostering and adoption was a better alternative to the system of state-sponsored orphanages.

His charity has now reached its goal of getting one million children fostered or adopted, which is 85% of the children in the state-run institutions in China. It has since expanded into Thailand and Vietnam.

Robert Glover with two Chinese orphans helped by his charity.



An independent evaluation of the pilot project in Shanghai by the University of East Anglia concluded that it was one of the best foster care projects in the world, and in 2003 this led to an invitation from the Ministry of Civil Affairs in Beijing to expand the project nationally. In 2005 Robert was awarded an

OBE by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II for services to orphans and vulnerable children in China.

Told with humour and simplicity, *As Many as the Stars* gives a deeper understanding of the importance of families and how to live with greater compassion, generosity and courage.

Robert now works as an adviser at conferences, events and consortia around the world. A feature documentary entitled *Children of Shanghai* has been made about his work, narrated by Bear Grylls.

In his endorsement of the book, adventurer and TV presenter Bear writes: "A determined man can overcome all obstacles. Robert Glover OBE is a friend and a true hero of mine. Lives in Asia have

been greatly impacted by having a loving, local family to call their own.

"At a time when there's so much negativity and cynicism, here's proof that positive, compassionate action can transform the lives of an entire generation."

Jackie Pullinger (Author of *Chasing the Dragon*), who works with drug addicts and prostitutes in the Walled City in Hong Kong, said: "At last the world has a story it's been hoping for. This is a true story... I watched it happen with wonder."

■ *As Many as the Stars* was released by Hodder and Stoughton in October, priced £16.99 hardback.

■ careforchildren.com



Dan Walker (c) BBC.

Dan tells stories of remarkable people

BBC1 Breakfast show host Dan Walker has just written a new book about some of the remarkable people he has met during his career as a journalist and TV presenter.

■ In *Remarkable People*, Dan, who also hosts *Football Focus* and has presented everything from *Match of the Day* to Olympics coverage, recounts inspiring stories of the courage and selflessness of people he has met throughout his career.

He is determined to shine a light onto stories of selflessness and compassion that seldom make the headlines and he recounts tales of incredible humanity, empathy, and a steely determination to transform lives, restore trust, renew hope.

And Dan is quite a remarkable person himself, climbing to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro for charity and known for putting his family and faith first despite his highly successful career to date.

He is the father of three young girls and despite being a sports commentator does not work on Sundays, giving himself time to focus on his family and his Christian faith.

Talking to *Sorted Magazine*, Dan explains that his faith is very important to him: "I don't take much seriously in life except for my faith and my family," he said. "I believe that if you have a strong faith in Jesus Christ, it has to make a difference to how you live your life."

"It informs who I am and who I would like to be, where I'm going, the way I talk, the way I act, hopes, dreams, aspirations etc. It is a significant part of every day I live," he said.

"I would like to think that it reduces pride and self-obsession and makes you think more carefully about the people around you, and the impact you're having on the community and society around you. For me, it underpins everything I am and want to be."

■ *Remarkable People* is published by Headline Publishing Group and is widely available.

Memorable moments from a long career in broadcasting

■ High up in Norwich Cathedral is a wide gallery called the triforium, a vantage point where I've spent several Sunday afternoons producing outside broadcast recordings of special services for BBC Radio Norfolk. We covered the moving and memorable, from the Queen Mother's death to the centenary celebration of Norwich City FC when the congregation sang 'On the Ball City' accompanied by the organ.

Working in local radio – as I did for 25 years of my career – was certainly wide ranging. One minute out and about reporting, the next behind the microphone in the studio hosting a variety of live programmes while also producing comedy quizzes and shows at venues from village halls to the Theatre Royal. But as a Christian, having the chance to share church services live or recorded, particularly at Christmas, was special, if occasionally challenging too.

At Sheringham parish church all went smoothly but later we discovered we'd inadvertently done a live broadcast to the adjoining care home because the church's loop system was picked up loud and clear by the hearing

Former BBC Radio Norfolk broadcaster Tony Mallion recalls some memorable moments from Christmas carol and other services over the years while also looking ahead to life after lockdown.



aids of the residents next door. They were delighted.

My broadcasting began in 1984 moving from 15 years in newspapers to be one of the founders of Radio Broadland. Initially going to the newsroom clearly God – and programme organiser Mike Stewart – had other ideas as

Mike called me into his office. "We need a religious programme. You're religious and you've done some hospital radio. You can do it," he said and so, in that first week on air, I was creating and presenting Gospel Scene, a Christian magazine and music show, landing a recorded interview with Cliff Richard to launch it. He was at Ipswich on a Tear Fund concert tour. I was nervous; he wasn't. My faltering questions were met with eloquent answers.

It wasn't long before I suggested recording a carol service. We didn't have enough equipment so I drafted in help from Hospital Radio Yare in Yarmouth (where like so many others I had my first experience of radio) and asked St Andrew's Church in my home town, Gorleston, to hold a special service. As a youngster I first attended Sunday School at that church but it was in my teens, through the work of Crusaders, that I became a Christian and soon after felt journalism and later broadcasting were a calling for me.

That St Andrew's service was followed by scores of others, most memorably broadcasting live for several years the annual Theatre Royal

Pantomime cast service (oh yes we did!) from a packed St Peter Mancroft. It was the last thing I did before I retired. Not a bad finale.

Since hanging up my headphones I've had the privilege of producing and presenting a series of Festivals of Remembrance in Great Yarmouth, with the last one to mark the centenary of WW1, at the Hippodrome Circus where, like the Royal Albert Hall, poppies rained down from the roof for the two minutes' silence; and staging an annual carol service for my own church (Cliff Park Community, Gorleston) at the local Pavilion Theatre – though sadly not this year. Instead we've worked on a studio based carol service going out on our local Harbour Radio as well as social media.

There's also been opportunities to host concerts like the annual Methodist Songs of Praise at Thursford as well as working with the Norfolk Fellowship Band of the Salvation Army which was the last thing I did a couple of days before lockdown in March. And we'd like to think this might be the first thing we do when we emerge from all of this. Now there's something to look forward to in the spring!

GOOD NEWS

FOR NORWICH & NORFOLK

■ Good News for Norwich & Norfolk is published by Network Norwich & Norfolk, part of Christian Community Trust for Norwich and Norfolk Ltd. Registered charity no 1105340.

■ Website: www.networknorfolk.co.uk
 ■ Editorial: 07712 788762 or e-mail stories to keith.morris@networknorwich.co.uk or send copy to Pear Tree Farmhouse, Wymondham Road, Wrenningham, Norwich NR16 1AT.
 ■ Advertising: Helen Baldry (01603) 926120
 ■ Distribution: Alan Lusher 07743 926884
 ■ Editor and designer: Keith Morris
 ■ Regular writers: Sandie Shirley, Helen Baldry, Kevin Gotts, Eldred Willey, Tony Rothe

■ Churches, Christian organisations and individuals from Norwich and Norfolk are invited to send news, events and pictures which relate to the demonstration of the Gospel in social action, community care and evangelism.

■ The deadline for material for the Spring edition is Friday February 19. Distribution is from Thursday March 11.

■ Reproduction of any part of this publication without permission is strictly forbidden. But please ask as we are usually happy to oblige for a credit line in non-commercial situations.

■ We endeavour to adhere to the IMPRESS standards code. If you have a complaint you should, in the first instance, contact the editor keith.morris@networknorwich.co.uk with details. If you are still not satisfied you should contact IMPRESS, details below.



Regulated by IMPRESS:
The Independent Monitor
for the Press CIC
IMPRESS, 16-18 New Bridge Street,
London, EC4V 6AG
T 020 3325 4288
E complaints@impress.press
W impress.press

Matt's Christmas song of peace and hope

Church minister, author and songwriter, **Matt McChlery**, has launched a new Christmas song to share a message of hope and peace after fighting back from a cancer diagnosis. **Sandie Shirley reports.**

Have you Heard describes the Christian reason for the season. It declares why a baby born to a humble family in a barn with smelly animals became a man who is important to us all as our Saviour, explains Matt, who teamed up with singer songwriter Kate Mills to release the song in November.

The former primary school teacher whose great, great, great grandfather wrote the Victorian hymn: 'Onward Christian Soldiers' says he has known the saving power of Jesus Christ when he looked death in the face.

Matt, who has walked the waters of faith to combat cancer, is a member of the Association of Christian Writers' 'Brecks and Pens' group near Downham Market. He was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, aged just 36 with a wife and young family, when he heard the bleak hospital report nearly six years ago.



Author and songwriter
Matt McChlery.

"I knew I was safe in Jesus' hands whatever happened, but I am weak; I am not strong, but he has been my strength. I learnt God was with me. He was carrying me and fighting for me," says Matt who is also a live performer, worship leader,

speaker and music tutor.

That dark time spurred him on to write a blog detailing his journey from diagnosis to remission two years later.

His chronicles have inspired nations while he achieved a 'finalist' position for a national

blog award.

Matt was born in Zimbabwe and at 40 is something of a veteran songwriter after writing his first composition at just 15. Now a deacon at the King's Church, Wisbech, he has also taught himself the guitar and plays hand drums.

Sustained and encouraged by his faith, his songs have always reflected a gospel signpost for others. They have been heard and sung in churches, communities and aired on worldwide radio stations as well as a few seasonal TV programmes.

Matt also plays renditions of other worship songs, but his influential talent has had a different spin when invited to play at coffee shops or festivals and he sings recognisable cover songs from the radio such as Coldplay and Adele.

"The lyrics still carry something that will point people towards God," says Matt, who uses social media, YouTube and his website to further extend his message.

Covid-19 has called a halt to live events yet on-line work has increased and Matt offers virtual concerts. "I have also been taking part in a song writing challenge to write a song every month for the whole of 2020; I have not missed a month yet," he says.

Now he has launched a crowd funding campaign to record a new EP. Find out more at: www.mattmcchlery.com

Tim talks of faith, politics and integrity

As the divisive US presidential election was still in full flow, former Liberal Democrat leader **Tim Farron** spoke at an online event organised by **Surrey Chapel** in Norwich about the topic of integrity. **Helen Baldry** reports.

Tim Farron, currently MP for West Morland and Lonsdale, was leader of the Liberal Democrats for two years before stepping down at the 2017 general election, stating that he had become "torn between living as a faithful Christian and serving as a political leader".

The Norwich online event, entitled 'The I Factor: How important is integrity in our leaders?' was held on Zoom, hosted by Surrey Chapel and attended by around 100 people in November. Tim said he was familiar with Norfolk which he described as: "A glorious place... flipping hard to get to!" His sister lived just outside Norwich so he is familiar with the county.

Tim was first involved in politics at 16, became a Christian at 18 and is married with four children, owns two dogs and turned 50 during lockdown.

Not brought up in a particularly Christian household, Tim remembers going to church once as a child. However, he did hear the gospel a couple of times in his childhood and there was a boy at college who was a Christian "a lovely guy, everybody liked him."

However, to Tim, his faith was "weird, prescriptive and unattractive."

Tim's own commitment to follow Jesus happened when he was in Singapore as a young adult. The people occupying his room previously left their books on the shelves.

Tim said: "I ended up reading the weird God stuff! It struck me... it just hit me almost with a physical force - it's true!"

He said: "It's been far from plain sailing ever since. There have been times when I've backslidden. God is gracious, he's got us in his hands."

Tim describes himself as a "Christian liberal, not a liberal Christian." His faith has caused tension in his career and caused him to relinquish political power. He seems completely at ease with the position he is currently in: "I love what I'm doing now."

He describes leading the Lib Dems as "a massive honour" and said there is something liberating about being "post-ambitious". He believes resigning was the most useful thing he could have done. He said: "The most important part of my job is the opportunity and privilege to serve other people."

Every year he deals with tens of thousands of cases as an MP. He said: "It's not just the number of people we're helping, but the depth and seriousness of the problems people are dealing with." He cites current problems as people who are stranded in another country or had their cancer operations cancelled and the widespread increase in poverty and unemployment.

It is important to him to communicate faithfully and publicly about being a Christian. The focus on Tim's faith put him in a difficult position as Liberal Democrat leader. He said: "I'd either have to backslide and be a failure as a Christian in order to move the conversation on. Option two was to be dogged and know what I should do and be faithful to Jesus." He felt that the option was to either be a bad Christian or be a bad leader. "That's a rubbish choice, let's do neither."

Tim says that he gave up the leadership



Tim Farron.
Picture by
Richard
Townshend/
Wikipedia.

for something infinitely and eternally more valuable.

Integrity in politics is about being less selfish and less vain. It's being able to put others before yourself. Tim gave examples: "Being prepared to get marked down by the whips. It actually looks like trashing your career. In the Bible, love is always costly... I think the same goes for integrity."

Jesus teaches about integrity. He is the only person who ever lived who stands up to scrutiny and his integrity is linked to humility, explained Tim.

If the electorate acknowledges that nobody's perfect, should we lower our expectations when it comes to integrity in politics, he asked?

Tim believes that if you put your ultimate hope and trust in a politician then you'll be disappointed and you'll have to compromise.

He said: "That doesn't mean that integrity doesn't matter." He talked about John Major's 'back to basics' campaign in the 1990s talking about morality, decency, importance of the family, setting up the Conservative party as the party of morality.

Subsequently MPs' dirty laundry was publicly rummaged through and the view that evolved was that you can do what you like. Tim said: "I do think if you cannot be truthful and faithful to those closest in your life, how are we meant to trust you in public? We shouldn't hold others to a higher standard than we hold for ourselves. The challenge for Christians is to demonstrate a radical difference, which involves being countercultural when you put your trust in Jesus."

Tim concluded: "Be careful where your hope lies - make sure it's in the right person."

BECAUSE MORE AND MORE PEOPLE IN NORFOLK
DON'T HAVE ADDRESSES OF THEIR OWN,
HERE'S OURS. STMARTINSHOMELESS.ORG



St Martins
more than a home
for the homeless

opinion column

A bright hope for tomorrow

Andrew Frere-Smith is Development Worker for **Imagine Norfolk Together**, based in King's Lynn.

■ As an eight-year-old, I can remember walking to primary school and passing groups of intimidating teenagers loitering and laughing as they made their way to the high school at the opposite end of town. I hoped that one day I would be as tall as them and no longer feel so small and vulnerable. It was only a few years later and I was the high school pupil looking down on the young ones. My hope had been fulfilled.

As a teenager I hoped that one day I would feel normal and no longer be the gangling, awkward, spotty and embarrassed individual that I had become. Hopes of ever having a girlfriend were a distant dream. Yet today, at 62, I am a grandfather with a wonderful wife, two impressive sons and grandchildren. Sometimes miracles happen, hopes and dreams are fulfilled!



Our personal hopes may sound silly when we reveal them but, actually, they are very important. In the Bible, Proverbs 13 verse 12 says that "Hopes deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life."

It is good to have hopes, desires, dreams and ambitions. They often motivate us to give more effort than we might otherwise do. When our hopes are fulfilled, sometimes despite ourselves, we are encouraged to have greater faith.

In this time of uncertainty, many of us are having to learn to live life a day at a time. Having the discipline not to worry about tomorrow can be a constant struggle. I want to be able to plan for the future, to know where I will spend my holiday and who I will be able to share it with. But at the moment these things are not possible.

Should I abandon my hopes? Is it better not to think about the future? I don't think so. I still want to have dreams, ambitions and hopes, but most of all I want the faith of St Julian of Norwich that "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well."

As a vaccine comes closer, it may not be so long before the pandemic comes under control.

In the meantime, I hold onto words from the wonderful hymn, Great is thy Faithfulness, which proclaims that God's desire has always been, and will always be, to provide us with 'Faith for today and bright hope for tomorrow'.

New chaplaincy is launched on Broads

A new **Waterways Chaplaincy** hub has recently opened on the Norfolk Broads, and it is now looking for more volunteer chaplains to help cover the large area. **Tony Rothe** reports.

Angie Baldwin, an experienced chaplain, has moved into the area and been joined by Mike Cadman. Mike has been commissioned following a training period, but brings with him lots of experience in other areas of public life. Both chaplains will have their own 'patch' to work as part of those communities, but they will also work across the whole area to try and provide the pastoral support, for which the chaplaincy is well known, to all who use the waterways.

Waterways Chaplaincy is an established national organisation which helps those who live and work on or alongside waterways, canals, and rivers in both rural and urban communities in the UK.

It operates as part of Workplace Matters, which in turn is part of the Church Army, and is an ecumenical partnership reaching out and taking Christian values through its chaplains into the community.

The two chaplains will look to recruit additional chaplains to provide a better coverage across the area and work to get to know those who live and work on and near the local rivers and Broads. Angie and Mike are delighted with the reception they have received from the Broads Authority and Norfolk Police which will enable them to target their pastoral work where it is most needed.

Mike says: "We have met with the Broads Authority who are happy that we are working alongside them. We have also met with Broads Beat, the Broads Police, and they have involved us in their information community. They have already



New Norfolk Broads chaplains, Angie Baldwin and Mike Cadman.

given us one or two people to try and help, so we are pastorally active and spiritually reactive.

"At the moment there are just the two of us to cover the whole area. We manage to get around, but a few more chaplains would be a great help. If you see us around in our 'gilets' or in the boat with our banners, please say 'hello'. We would be happy to talk and help in any way we can."

People live and work on the waterways - many use their boats for recreational purposes, but some choose to live on board. This means that the live-aboard boater will not have a post code and as such will find it difficult to register with a GP, claim benefit, tax a vehicle, or

even open a bank account.

Choosing this way of life does not always give access to schools, medical facilities or other amenities and these problems can be compounded when bereavement, depression, illness, or unemployment occurs.

Chaplains are volunteers from local churches who visit the waterways regularly, offering companionship and a listening ear to individuals and businesses. They take an interest in whoever they meet - boaters, holidaymakers, cyclists, walkers, anglers, etc as well as all those who live and work on and care for the Broads. They all have enhanced DBS checks and are fully trained,

including safeguarding training, to fulfil their role.

They support and encourage everyone regardless of religion, orientation, or race, and are always happy to offer practical and spiritual help, or just to discuss spiritual and practical matters if invited to do so. The network of waterways chaplains are well placed to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable, responding to concerned community members, providing pastoral support, care and guidance.

You can contact Mike at mcipbds@btinternet.com or on 07885 282465 or Angie at angiebaldwin@gmail.com or phone 07771 438062 www.waterwayschaplaincy.org.uk

cards n things

Greetings cards, stationery, helium balloons, party products and Thorntons chocolates

193 Reepham Road, Hellesdon, NR6 5NZ - cardsandthings@btconnect.com - 01603 485832

Helping children on the road to nowhere

A child out of school is a child on a highway to nowhere. That is the stark reality which many people in Norfolk have come to glimpse for the first time, thanks to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is also the reality which stirred Norfolk-based **Tom Dannatt** to create the charity **Street Child**. **Eldred Willey** reports.

Since 2008, Street Child has been providing education for children in the world's toughest places.

As Tom went through his twenties, the pieces of Street Child were already beginning to fall into place, although he didn't realise it at the time. At Oxford University he shared a theology tutorial group with a student called David Lloyd. Both would later train as lawyers. Another friendship Tom formed at Oxford was with Lucinda, who at the time was studying politics.

Tom always enjoyed adventurous travel and in 2008 a research trip took him to Sierra Leone. It was there that he ran into a local charity which was working with street children. The charity asked Tom if he could replicate the project. Together they got the first 33 children into school. What could be better? Especially in an impoverished and conflict-shattered country which, in development terms, was bottom of the bottom.

Four years later, back in England, Tom got a call from Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. The line was crackly, and he could not quite make out what the other person was saying. But he thought he heard the words "one and half million". He eventually asked the caller to repeat the number, and he had been right. The Department for International Development, which normally only funded the big players, had decided to try a wild card and had spotted Street Child.

As Street Child started to show that they could handle the big money, other doors began to open. In 2012, they also came up with the idea of a Sierra Leone marathon, which proved immensely popular. People were happy to pay the air fares for a unique fundraising and life experience. And then suddenly Ebola hit, and all of Street Child's teachers became Ebola educators, showing local people how to avoid contracting the virus.

The terror which the deadly disease struck among journalists turned into an unexpected opportunity for Street Child. The news outlets wanted the stories, but they didn't want to come and get them. So Street Child created its own video production team, and got the content onto Newsnight and Channel 4 News.

As they began to see what was possible, the phrase "thousand children" started to enter Tom's vocabulary. By the end of the outbreak he was looking after 12,000



children who had lost their care giver.

Things were changing in the charity world, and some of the things which Street Child stood for began to swing into view. Funders were becoming less prescriptive, and more open to partnership working and solutions which came from the ground up. The line between humanitarian responses and long-term development was starting to blur.

All of this set the scene for the rapid growth of Street Child and created a favourable environment for a series of mergers. First came that with Children in Crisis, which brought Congo, Afghanistan and Burundi into Street Child's portfolio. With growing confidence, Tom navigated four other mergers in quick succession, pitching Street Child into the centre of major refugee crises, such as those stemming from Myanmar and South Sudan.

The fellow students from Oxford had, meanwhile, come into their own. David Lloyd became a founding trustee, which worked out perfectly, since he was appointed lead vicar of the Mitre Group of parishes in Norwich, where Tom goes to church. Lucinda went one better and became not just a founding trustee but also his wife. The couple now live with their four boys just outside Norwich. With the trustees they oversee a passionate team which gathers regularly, speaks frankly and hammers out innovative ideas. Senior staff turnover is, unsurprisingly, very low.

This year Covid-19 has upped the ante. Besides getting children into school for the

first time, Street Child now has to figure out how to get children back into school after they have dropped out and are maybe working in the market to supplement a family's reduced income. But Tom seems more determined than ever.

"Children can't go to school from the street," he said. "But if they can read and write and add – then they have a chance."

Street Child has launched a special appeal to meet the challenge of Covid-19. If you would like to contribute to it, you can do so at: www.street-child.co.uk

Norfolk church offers free help with debts

■ The Mid-Norfolk branch of Christians Against Poverty (CAP), based at Fountain of Life Church in Ashill, is offering free debt help to local people facing money problems.

Heather Nunn, Mid-Norfolk CAP Debt Centre Manager, said: "We know that most people want to have a nice Christmas but it's hard to do when bills are piling up.

"Getting help now can take the pressure off and stop the worry and misery.

"Christmas is supposed to be a lovely celebration, but we know that for many people in our area there's not enough money to pay essential household bills. So there's nothing left to make Christmas Day special.

"Our team is here to help with debt problems through our CAP Debt Help service and because we're local we can also support clients practically too.

"Over the years we've had all sorts of ways to help people make Christmas that little bit better by offering hampers, linking clients up with local food banks, arranging emergency shops, emergency fuel, support, encouragement and a friendly voice at the end of a phone.

"We're urging people to get in touch now for debt help because we don't want anyone worrying about how they'll manage this Christmas.

"This year has been challenging enough with the coronavirus pandemic, so we want to encourage people to get help now so that they can have a more positive end to 2020."

CAP client Joanne said: "Like any single parent, I was doing my best, I had a job but I struggled to provide for us on the money I could earn. Looking back now I didn't realise how much my finances impacted every aspect of my life.

"Even though I was working hard to earn money, I was constantly having to deal with the feeling of disappointing my son. I heard about CAP and now everything has changed. This Christmas we have peace. And I realise that's what makes my son happy."

If you are struggling with debt and need help, get in contact with CAP today on 0800 328 0006 or visit capuk.org.

Kevin Cobbold Funeral Services

01603 528800



07789 586817

Christian funeral director

Independent, affordable and personal

Home visits, Full quotations, Funeral Plans, Memorials

109 Cromer Road, Norwich, NR6 6XW

www.cobboldfunerals.co.uk

cobboldkevin@yahoo.co.uk



Val Dodsworth with her MBE.

Val is an inspirational Christian pioneer

Inspirational Norwich Christian pioneer Val Dodsworth has been usefully spending her time during lockdown writing a short autobiography of her remarkable life. **Keith Morris** reports.

■ Val modestly describes it as: "The story of God's dealings with a very ordinary and unexceptional human being; of how He opened my 'blind eyes' and turned me from darkness to light. Of how I then received His forgiveness for messing up the life He had given me, experienced the joy of a place amongst His own people, and the hope of Abundant Life in His presence after this life is done."

Born in Ipswich, Val grew up near Reading during a childhood full of dogs, horses and often absent parents.

She became pregnant at 19 in an age when unmarried mothers were considered something to be ashamed of and it was decided that Val should give up the baby. She went to live for the duration of the pregnancy at a Christian organisation called The Mission of Hope.

Val did indeed give up her daughter, Ruth, but happily met up with her 20 years later and they have been in touch ever since.

It was at the Mission of Hope that Val discovered the Christian faith which was to be the driving force for the rest of her life.

For a while she went back to being a stable girl and started attending Greyfriars Church in Reading.

A turning point was answering an advertisement for a Housekeeper at The Mayflower Family Centre in Canning Town, East London.

She was offered the job by Rev David Sheppard, the leader of Mayflower, an England cricketer and later Bishop of Liverpool.

"I loved the job and stayed there for five years," recalled Val.

Her next move was to Langley

House Trust, a prisoner rehabilitation charity – her first contact with the Probation Service.

"Providing a home for the homeless, and especially homeless ex-prisoners was beginning to take hold of my heart," said Val.

She attended Middlesex Polytechnic and became a trainee probation officer in Corby in Northants. For the next 20 years Val worked as a probation officer in Northants, then after her marriage, in Lowestoft, Ipswich then Norwich.

Val married Bill Dodsworth and they worshipped together at Surrey Chapel in Norwich. Bill worked for Rowntree's in Norwich making chocolate but sadly died in 1992. Val started to take various Christian workers into her home and the seeds of The House of Genesis began to germinate in her mind.

Val continued work in probation and then in Norwich Prison as a chaplain and her guests at home grew to four or five including one ex-prisoner – Richard - who first suggested setting up a charity to accommodate and support men coming out of prison.

Val bought a six-bedroom house in Norwich and the vision started to take shape. Today there are four homes and 16 residents.

The work was never smooth running for long but Val persisted and she also found time to help launch Street Pastors in Norwich.

In 2015, Val was deservedly made an MBE for her services to the homeless in Norwich.

If you would like to receive a free PDF or printed copy of Val's book – Val Dodsworth a Reminiscence, you should contact Val at dodsworthval@gmail.com or on 07758 208470.

Samara's life-changi

Young mother **Samara Levy's** desire to help war-weary Syrians has propelled her on a life-changing journey amid danger and poverty. **Sandie Shirley** reports.

As the founder of a charity dedicated to aiding the traumatised people of Syria, Samara's work has helped to open the floodgates of provision for hundreds of thousands.

Samara shared her epic sacrificial story at a Zoom meeting organised by the Norwich branch of the FGB in the autumn. She told how a simple miraculous act of obedience has snowballed into a giant, expanding, £2.3m mission since she first heard the call of God nearly seven years ago.

Living in comparison with relative comfort, ease, and luxury in Brighton, Samara has been moved to radically love her neighbour as Jesus commands.

"His words are very simple, and are black and white, asking us to share what we have and to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and care for the sick," says Samara, who has sacrificed social life and material pursuits to instead pour time and energy into this calling.

It is believed there are more than 11.7 million people in Syria requiring humanitarian help and the UN has described it as "the worst humanitarian crisis of our time."

Samara launched the charity, Samara's Aid Appeal, to help those internally displaced, bereaved, traumatised, impoverished, and homeless. With her dedicated team she has voiced numerous pleas for funding and clothes. Some contributions have come



Samara Levy.

from Norfolk churches and include Hope Community Church in Wymondham.

The appeals have had dramatic results, sending a total of 110 containers and lorries to the Middle East as well as providing 11 ambulances to Syria and funding numerous growing initiatives that have included much needed medical care.

"Two thirds of the hospitals in Syria have been destroyed, damaged or are largely dysfunctional but our charity

aims at rebuilding the light of God," says Samara. "We established four temporary field hospitals at different times in the conflict, one of which treated 3,000 patients a month. Another permanent medical centre with specialist services is scheduled to open by the end of the year while we also work to our future goal for a large hospital with even more advanced facilities."

The overall need in Syria is dire and costly. Samara has witnessed the shocking large-scale devastation and horrific atrocities done to humanity. But the charity is responding by raising funding as a vital booster for medical and farming projects and providing support for orphans, disadvantaged children, and widows, empowering and equipping them to establish livelihoods.

The enlarging mission has meant stretching her hands of faith and raising her motivational voice to tell others of the life-threatening plight of the Syrian people. Many have been forced to flee their homes to escape violence, terrorism, persecution, and war while the lack of essentials means they struggle to survive.

Her heart was first moved after the graphic newsreels and reports of a rejected people on the margins of society who had fled from IS. They lived under canvas amid freezing temperatures and gun fire and



Samara Levy, in war-torn Syria.

ng Syria mission



Read Samara's story

■ Samara Levy's autobiography: 'Rebuilding the Ruins: Responding to God's Call to Serve Syria' unveils the story of miraculous protection and provision and features the lives of those she has met during numerous visits and how communities are beginning to pick up the pieces and live side-by-side despite the atrocities done to each other.

'Rebuilding the Ruins' (Hodder and Stoughton) is available from major book retailers including Waterstone, WH Smith, Eden and Amazon as well as at: www.samarasaidappeal.org



God's strong arm of delivery has continued for the challenges, dangers, and lessons that unfold.

But the responsibility as founder and overseer of the charity is daunting. Samara explains: Four years ago, IS attacked and took control of the area where our first mission hospital was situated and where our frontline team on the ground were working.

"It was a desperate situation, and their lives were in peril as, with IS, execution and imprisonment are all too prevalent, but fasting and prayer to seek God for his wisdom secured their immediate exit route just in time amid the IS rampage.

"I have learnt that Syria is one of the most complex and dangerous countries in the world with kidnappings, and attacks on health care. There are also fuel, electricity and supply shortages and many things must be imported so there are continual challenges to see projects completed.

"I have had to depend on the Lord to clearly see his regular breakthroughs, but it is important to be immersed in prayer."

As the country copes with Covid-19, which threatens people's income and livelihoods, the charity teams are helping to relieve the sick, the invalid and poorest of the poor.

many children wore flip flops in the snow. Soon afterwards she saw a picture of a baby who had been beheaded by IS. Tearful, sleepless and aching she got down on her knees to pray, asking how she could help.

"I wondered what I could do as a stay-at-home mum with young children with little to give, but I mounted a collection, in obedience to God's instructions, by asking mums in my son's class for clothes, blankets and shoes.

"We can do nothing by ourselves," says Samara, who recalls stretching her faith to fill one of the largest lorries available. Realising response was insufficient, she says: "I begged God's mercy to meet the gaping shortfall to fill the vehicle's 90 cubic metre capacity that would cost £6,500 to transport it to our first destination in Iraq."

Within the next fortnight, the community responded with church support and a school minibus arrived with stacks of boxes. "I had asked God: if he could feed the 5,000 would he also multiply the giving. The result was that my 'nets' were breaking!"

Those small beginnings rallied the nation as collections flooded in and now 109 more lorries and containers have been sent overseas as an explosive mission brings relief to hundreds of thousands.



Cannon and Ball at Norwich Salvation Army Citadel in 2008. Photo by Ian Munday.

Rock on Bobby Ball

Christian comedian **Bobby Ball**, who had countless audiences across Norfolk rocking with laughter, died at the end of October at the age of 76, after contracting Covid-19.

■ Part of classic comedy duo Cannon and Ball with friend Tommy Cannon, Bobby was on TV sets across the country in the 1970s and 1980s with their popular variety series The Cannon and Ball Show.

The duo regularly performed summer seasons at the Britannia Pier in Great Yarmouth in the 1980s and 90s, and in 2008 they appeared at the Salvation Army Citadel in Norwich as part of one of their Gospel tours - both performers were committed Christians.

Bobby was born Robert Harper in 1944 and met Tommy on a factory floor in Oldham where both were welders and they became life-long friends. They went on to form a singing duo called The Harper Brothers, performing in local pubs and clubs, but soon turned to their comedy act.

After the long-running Saturday night ITV show, Bobby also appeared in TV series' including Last Of The Summer Wine, Heartbeat, Mount Pleasant, Benidorm and Not Going Out, and the duo appeared on I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here! in 2005.

Speaking at the Citadel in Norwich in 2008,

Bobby spoke very frankly about the kind of person he had become - a heavy drinker and womaniser, who didn't care about the hurt he was causing his wife and family. It was a vicar who first challenged him to think about the claims of God on his life.

Bobby became a Christian and for about three years, the comedy duo didn't speak to each other and went their separate ways.

Bobby finally persuaded a reluctant Tommy to come to his grandchild's christening. He felt welcome, and at home - and that was the beginning of his own faith journey.

After Bobby died in Blackpool Victoria Hospital on October 28, close friend, colleague and biographer Chris Gidney, told Premier Christian Radio that he saw a "phenomenal" transformation when Bobby became a Christian: "I mean if you've ever seen a change in somebody, like a St Paul conversion, it was Bobby Ball. I mean absolutely phenomenal in so many different ways, particularly in lifestyle.

"Don't forget, Bob and Tom came from simple working class backgrounds. Then suddenly, literally overnight, they are top of the tree, earning more than anybody else in show business at that time and of course, it went to their heads and they did everything that they wanted to do and in some ways, it was pretty devastating on their lives.

"Bob was never ashamed of his faith in public because it has such an effect on him, a dramatic effect in his lifestyle and his family. He was just like a stick of Blackpool rock - you break Bobby and the word Jesus runs all the way through the middle!"

BRIGHT QUALITY PLUMBING

**No job too small
One year warranty on all work
Available weekends and evenings
Repairs and upgrades undertaken
Free estimates. No extra call-out charge
Handyman services also available**

**Please phone Greg Bright
Home: 01603 479216 Mobile: 07814182940**



New CD whispers a message of hope against the odds

Professional Norfolk composer and producer **Roger Mayor**, has released a new double CD of music, words and hope, despite living with cancer for the past decade. **Kevin Gotts** reports.

■ Roger has spent a lifetime devoted to Christian music, but believed that his recording days were over through serious illness.

With encouragement from friends, and inspired by the sad loss of a friend, Roger has spent the last 10 months writing, recording and finally producing the Whispers CD launched this month, interspersed with frequent hospital visits for cancer treatment.

"My aim all along has been to provide music that is enhanced by Bible readings and my own very brief personal reflections, with an underscore of appropriate, beautiful music of artistic merit, to give an uplifting experience of the presence of God," explains Roger.

He reflects that "hardly anyone speaks in whispers these days; we are so caught up in the bustle of everyday life. The Bible tells us on several occasions that God's message to us is only heard in whispers and in the stillness. The fifteen tracks on this CD have names that most can relate to easily such as Whispers of Hope, Whispers of Encouragement, Whispers of a Deeper Love, Whispers that All Shall be Well....and many more."

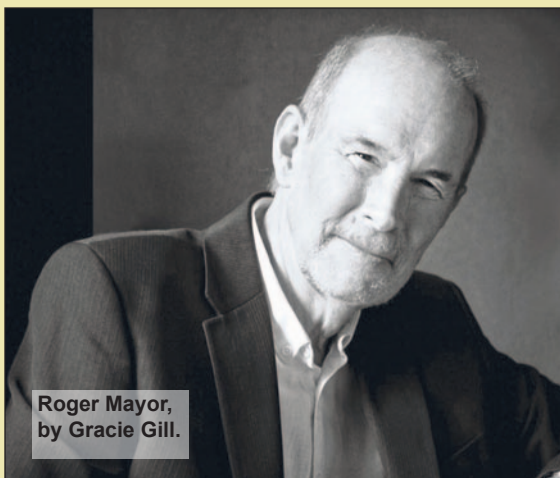
The piano is Roger's instrument - he started playing at the age of five. He explains: "my natural instinct was to write the whole album for gentle piano, building on my past history recording many Christian instrumental albums. But then I thought of some of the remarkably talented instrumentalists that I have recorded with these last 30 years and decided that 'Whispers' would be greatly enhanced by having them join me on some tracks."

Roger said: "Whispers was created out of much physical weakness. There were many weeks during the process when I couldn't walk unaided; I suffered severe bouts of dizziness / vertigo and I could rarely get comfortable at my desk and piano with excruciating lower back problems compounded by three secondary cancer tumours."

Almost ten years ago he began a battle to overcome Stage 4 prostate cancer, and reflects: "But I have yet again proved that St Paul was absolutely right: 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.' 'His strength is made perfect in our weakness.'"

Roger is married to Penny and together they live in a village some eight miles from Norwich with their two beloved golden retrievers. Roger concludes: "As I look back, I see the litter of a lifetime just fluttering in the breeze, while the whispers of God in my soul remind me of what really matters in my life."

The Whispers CD is available at www.rogermayor.uk



Roger Mayor,
by Gracie Gill.



The Dereham Community Fridge is run by Love Dereham and is based inside the Green Pastures Christian Centre. Pictured are centre managers Richard Shand and Iraina Humphry with Anita Clarke from Love Dereham. Picture by Love Dereham.

Community fridges open across Norfolk

There has been a surge in the growth of Community Fridges, often run by churches and Christian groups across Norfolk with 14 up and running and several more in the pipeline. **Tony Rothe** reports.

Research suggests that a typical UK household wastes £810 a year by throwing away food and drink which could have been eaten, and that £3 billion is wasted by food sectors.

Although there is a growing awareness of food waste, there are not too many easy ways for people or businesses to get food which is near its 'use by' date to those who can use it.

Community Fridges are communal places where surplus food is shared between people in a community, by local businesses and individuals. Since the first community fridge was trialled in 2016, at least 100 community fridges have taken root across the UK, helping thousands connect to their neighbours, access nutritious food, save money and reduce waste.

Fourteen of these fridges already operate in Norfolk, with locations at Costessey, Dereham, Dussindale, Earlham, Fakenham, Gorleston, Heartsease, Holt, North Walsham, South Lynn, Swaffham, Thetford (2), Wayland, and Wymondham.

Given an added urgency by the Covid-19 lockdowns, the movement is particularly active in the north of the county, where the Treehouse in Holt have just opened their fridge, and the District Council has just re-launched the popular Community Fridge in North Walsham.

A brand-new community fridge is set to open in Stalham. Jane Skivington, from Stalham Baptist Church, said: "Community fridges are becoming a popular way of preventing good food from ending up in the bin. We are in the process of setting one up in Stalham with the help of North Norfolk District Council. The idea is for local businesses, or individuals, to be able to donate surplus perishable food which is within its use by dates. This food is then made available for the general public to come and help themselves. There are no criteria required for having food from the fridge as the idea is to prevent waste, but we simply ask that you only take what you need. I'm excited about this as I feel it's something God called me to do."

The Sheringham Fridge is still at the planning stage, as they are still seeking a suitable venue for the fridge, in consultation with North Norfolk District Council. Co-ordinator Sadie Houghton said: "If anyone runs a cafe or a community space locally, who would be interested in hosting the fridge, I would love to hear from them."

Hubbub coordinates the world's biggest Community Fridge Network with

over 100 community fridges running around the UK and plenty more setting up.

They offer free support to groups to set up their community fridge and provide a comprehensive guide, design assets, health and safety templates and a free fridge! They have created a 'How To' guide and template materials to take you through, step by step, the stages for setting up a new Community Fridge. They have also created the Community Fridge Network to connect all of the Community Fridge projects across the UK and Ireland, so members can exchange advice and support.

Hubbub say "With each fridge sharing up to four tonnes of food per month, the collective impact of the Community Fridge Network is huge. Every year, 100 community fridges can redistribute 975 tonnes of food surplus (equivalent to 1.9 million meals!) benefitting over 77,000 people.

"What's more important though, is the stories that we hear from the communities. The fridge brings people together, it addresses social isolation and provides people with the opportunity to access healthy food, try something new and save money. A fridge is often so much more than a fridge. As well as introducing you to new people and foods, community fridges host all kinds of activities such as cooking workshops, allotments, clothes swaps, you name it."

For more information, visit: www.norfolkrecycles.com or www.hubbub.org.uk.



**MUDDY PUDDLES
NURSERY**

PART OF YMCA NORFOLK

YMCA

**Developing confident
and caring children**

Book a tour
www.muddy-puddles.org

Coming soon



Open Christmas set to go-ahead

■ Every year, Norwich Open Christmas provides food and company for people who would otherwise be on their own, and this year is no exception, although it will look a little different.

The traditional sit-down hot meal cannot be staged because pandemic restrictions mean the safety of the volume of guests and volunteers usually involved cannot be guaranteed. If compliant with government restrictions at the time, the event will take place on December 25 outside 'The Halls' in Norwich under marquees, providing a drop-in style soup kitchen meal from 12 noon to 2pm.

Carol Lunney, Trustee of Norwich Open Christmas said: "We want people to know we are here for them...if guests call by, expecting the usual Christmas event, we will be there for them, albeit in pared back form. It's very important for Norwich Open Christmas to do something this year, not only for our guests but also for our volunteers. Norwich Open Christmas is a big part of all our lives."

In addition, gifts of non-perishable food and festive items will be delivered to guests who are unable to attend. Organisers have already contacted previous guests who normally receive a lift to the venue, and the take-up for this has been good.

Norwich Open Christmas wouldn't happen without the generous support of local people, groups and businesses.

Carol said: "The council and charities across Norwich have been very supportive of each other this year. We all want to make sure that people don't fall through the cracks."

norwichopenchristmas.org.uk

Toys and tins for vulnerable children

■ The Salvation Army's Toys & Tins Appeal across Norfolk has seen a 37 per cent increase in referrals for vulnerable children from social services, schools and support groups with more expected before Christmas.

In 2019, The Salvation Army initially received requests to help 2,261 children. This year, the initial figure is 3,106, a 37 per cent increase.

Organisers are concerned that they will not have enough presents to meet demand and are calling on the public to donate online.

Major Barry Willson, coordinator of the county-wide appeal, said: "We are determined to bring the hope and joy of Christmas to families in need across Norfolk."

"We've already packed more than 1,400 food boxes but now, as our attention turns to the presents, our shelves are worryingly empty and the number of children coming to us is increasing."

"We need the help of the great Norfolk public to ensure children don't miss out on a present to open on Christmas Day."

Those wishing to support the appeal should visit the Toys & Tins Appeal webpage for further information and links to a JustGiving page and Amazon Wish List:

www.salvationarmy.org.uk/toysandtins.

John was first Norfolk master beekeeper

Norfolk's first-ever master beekeeper is also a master of publishing as the treasurer of a successful church magazine for several South Norfolk villages. **Kevin Gotts** reports.

The art of bee-keeping can be traced back for many thousands of years, including references in the Bible and in the Egyptian pyramids. Retired science teacher John Everett, from Rockland St Mary, is one of its modern-day practitioners and lays claim to being Norfolk's first-ever Master Beekeeper, recognised by the British Beekeepers Association, after passing no fewer than 13 practical and theory exams back in 2009.

John met future wife Ruth in Uganda in 1969 where they were both teaching science. After returning to the UK in 1975, they moved to Rockland St Mary, where they have a small orchard and breed honey bees, sell beekeeping equipment and run beginner's beekeeping courses. At present they have 30 hives in three sites at home or nearby.

John says he keeps bees because he enjoys the hobby: "This is beneficial to the environment, as bees help pollinate some flowering plants, honey sales helps pay for the hobby and lots of beekeepers come to their shop for equipment, advice and a chat. During Covid-19 some of the chats have lasted a long time!"

Unfortunately, with social distancing the beginner's courses have not run in 2020.

"Beekeeping has been practised for very many thousands of years. There are stories of honey being found in the pyra-



Norfolk master beekeeper John Everett. Picture by Kevin Gotts.

mids, and in the Bible references are made to the sweetness of honey and honeycomb and the venom of swarming bees.

"Bees rarely sting when swarming but swarms in flight sound ferocious," explained John.

"Bees are a group of insects that feed entirely on plants. Their source of protein, used mainly for growth, is pollen, the male sex cells of plants. Nectar, a sugary solution to attract insects, is their main source of energy-giving carbohydrates."

"One of the biggest disadvantages of beekeeping surrounded by arable farms is the lack of wild plants. Bees need a succession of flowers through the spring, summer and autumn to feed their colonies and make a surplus of honey/food for the winter when they cannot forage," said John.

John's neighbours are paid to grow crops and weeds compete with crops, so are destroyed by herbicides. The lack of food sources also affects other wild animals like many of the smaller birds, he says.

"This year, some of the city beekeepers have been much more successful than country beekeepers," says John, as there is a much bigger variety of plants in urban and city gardens.

John was invited to help beekeepers in Uganda in 2010 and says: "Beekeeping in Africa needs to be cheap to establish but honey can be a useful dietary addition as well as a source of income. Candles made out of beeswax gave the local people a source of light as most country homes did not have electricity."

"All foraging bees accidentally pollinate flowers when

they gather nectar and pollen," explains John. "We are not totally dependent on honey bees as solitary bees and bumble bees do a lot of pollinating."

John is also busy as treasurer of the "Eleven Says" church magazine, of which his wife Ruth is editor. It is given free to about 2300 homes in the eleven parishes of the Bramerton Group of churches.

The recipe that works for the magazine is 40% local business adverts that pay for the magazine, and the remaining 60% as a mixture of church news and village news.

John said: "It relies on lots of folk who are willing to deliver the magazines at no cost. It helps tell the community about what Christians believe and what the local church is doing. The village news, events and school articles encourage folk to read the magazine."

THE MATTHEW PROJECT
No compromise on hope

General advice line 01603 626 123
Youth advice line 0800 970 4866

The Matthew Project has been helping people live fuller lives, free from drug and alcohol misuse for more than 35 years. The charity has a Christian ethos, and is based in Norfolk. We provide support to young people, veterans, professionals, people in recovery, and the family and carers affected by substance misuse

Learn More

www.matthewproject.org

Andrew's life in real Golden Triangle

Former Norfolk quarry manager **Andrew Goodman** now

works in the Golden Triangle – not the one in Norwich but the original in Thailand – a region infamous as the world's largest producer of heroin.

Eldred Willey found out why.

Andrew and his wife, Shona, moved to Dereham in 1990, when he managed a quarry near Downham Market and started one at Easton, behind the Royal Norfolk Showground.

The couple had recently become Christians and joined the local Anglican church, St Nicholas. Andrew sometimes preached in the churches at Gressenhall and Dereham, and later the couple were baptised at Dereham Christian Fellowship and developed close links with Christian care home Eckling Grange.

Shona was just finishing her PhD in chemistry, and the couple went to a Christian festival called Spring Harvest looking for a new direction in life. While there they expressed an interest in working in an overseas mission – being particularly moved by the spiritual poverty in Asia. They went on to attend an OMF missions conference in 1992 and heard a Thai person speak about their life which sparked the couple's interest.

"I became aware of the lawlessness among the Shan people and started praying for them," said Andrew. "But I got scared, as the Golden Triangle where they live is the second biggest opium-producing area in the world, and the biggest producer of methamphetamines. But reading through the Bible book of Nehemiah I was very

Pictured right is Andrew Goodman and, below, a Thai woman who has been helped by the AIDS ministry.



struck by what Nehemiah said: 'Remember God who is great and awesome, and fight.'

(4:14) At the next conference worship session, the song was about building the kingdom out of living stones, which meant a lot to me as a quarry manager.

"Over the weekend I had doubts about the whole thing, but when I went in to work on Monday the weigh-bridge manager brought out a copy of the Daily Telegraph, which had a picture of the

Golden Triangle in it."

The couple moved out to Thailand in 1995, when their eldest daughter Sophie was two-and-a-half years old. They spent two years learning Thai and then a further two years learning the Shan language.

"Our work now has four foci," said Andrew, "Walking with Shan leaders in mutual encouragement, radio broadcasting, producing micro-SD cards with the Shan Bible to go in mobile phones, and running an AIDS care programme. We help children with education, because the parents have often died, and the grandparents need assistance.

"The Shan are still very much an unreached people. Twelve years ago there were 150 Shan Christians in Thailand and today there are 1,400. They are a strongly Buddhist group,

though they have become more receptive through radio broadcasts and through Shan Christians finding bridges to the Lord from their Buddhist beliefs."

But life has not been easy for the family, explained Andrew: "Like people everywhere we've had some issues. Our youngest son Isaac has suffered from chronic fatigue for four years, and Shona had a stroke from which she still has some balance issues. A Thai woman we know was very inspired by the way she's kept going."

OMF prayer groups in Dereham, Cromer and Heacham support the couple and they would be happy to hear from anyone else who is also interested in doing so.

You can contact Andrew Goodman on aungsa@yahoo.com



PRAY4THEZHUANG.ORG

#20millionwait



SIM




REVELATION

CAFE • TEA ROOM
CHRISTIAN
BOOKSHOP

Open Tues - Sat
Shop 10-4pm. Cafe 10-3pm
Shop 01603 619731
Cafe 01603 766978

www.norwichcrc.co.uk

St Michael-at-Plea Church,
Redwell St, Norwich, NR2 4SN

Priest's praise for staff after five-week hospital Covid battle

A Catholic priest who spent more than five weeks in critical care at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in King's Lynn, due to Covid-19, has praised the efforts of doctors and nurses, as well as two church ministers, for helping him to pull through. **Keith Morris** reports.

Fr Michael Stack.
Picture by Con
McHugh.



it is spiritual 'critical care' to help someone facing death know that their sins are absolved so that they can be at ease with God. It also matters that while the medical staff are frequently having to work very hard and fast to get everything done, chaplains make sure that there is as much time as it takes, not just for spiritual care in the strict sense, but in the broader sense of helping the patient to feel like a whole person, not just a medical case."

On Easter Sunday, Baptist hospital chaplain Rev Lee Gilbert received a call from critical care nurses asking him to say some prayers for a Catholic priest who was under their care. Lee used Facetime with the nurses holding an iPad near to Fr Michael.

"Whilst I had no idea as to whether Fr Michael could hear me or not, I knew that God could hear me and afterwards I spoke to Fr Michael's sister and told her what I had done

and I believe it gave her a great deal of comfort when she herself could not come into the hospital. Subsequently Fr Michael got slowly better and as he was coming out of his induced coma, I was asked again by the staff to say some prayers and as I was praying (again via Facetime) I saw a little smile on his face. Again I had no knowledge as to whether he heard those prayers or not.

"Slowly but surely Fr Michael's health improved and he was transferred to a ward where I could go and have a face-to-face conversation and we reflected together on his journey through Covid-19 and through the hospital.

"Covid-19 was horrible in many respects for chaplaincy and for the staff on Critical Care and the wider NHS, especially at the height of the first wave," said Rev Lee. "But meeting Fr Michael, both through Facetime and face-to-face was one of my own highlights of the year."

Fr Michael is now back on form – still with his sense of humour intact – and he has already been back to visit the critical care ward at Queen Elizabeth's where he met other survivors. He is also working on a new edition of his book and adding a chapter about his own experience.

■ Article extracts from The Sower magazine

Life Stories



Everyone has a story worth telling

- Capture your life stories
- Preserve your memories for future generations
- Share your faith journey with family & friends

We make it easy for you to create a written record of your life.

Sit back and tell us the stories of your life.

We will write your story and then produce and publish it in a colour paperback book along with your pictures.

Tel: 07712 787762

Email: web@networknorwich.co.uk

lifestories.org.uk

Standard Package
£999

Brought to you by the team at **networknorfolk**

Fr Michael Stack from Coventry "died" twice and was on a ventilator for three weeks and in critical care for five weeks before he miraculously pulled through, astonishing the medical team with his recovery.

He is full of praise for the doctors and nurses – but he also drew strength from being visited and prayed for by Catholic priest Fr Gordon Adam and Baptist hospital chaplain Rev Lee Gilbert.

Fr Michael himself has spent 25 years as a hospital chaplain so knows the vital role chaplains can play for many patients.

As the author of a book entitled *Lord When Did We See You Sick*, about the healing power of prayerful companionship with the sick and dying, Fr Michael feels the experience has only strengthened his faith.

Prayers were said around the world for him as he lay unconscious with the most severe form of the virus in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

He fell ill at the start of a short break from his role at Christ the King in Coventry where he had been supporting the parish and deanery in his semi-retirement.

The 69-year-old, who during his church career was hospital chaplain at four high profile hospitals in Nuneaton, Wolverhampton, Birm-

ingham and Coventry working in critical care wards, was planning to stay with his sister in Dereham.

Within a short time of arriving in Norfolk he had developed a bad cough and started hallucinating. He was admitted by ambulance to hospital.

"I was on a ventilator for 21 days and 36 days in critical care," said Fr Michael. "I don't remember much because I was completely medicated – a blessing in disguise.

"When the priest came in, to give me the sacrament of anointing, it was quite strange because I had been independent for so long – but we all need other people. The knowledge of having the sacrament helped me, I felt better. It strengthens my faith to know that we are part of the healing process of Jesus Christ."

Fr Michael had a tracheostomy to help his breathing and he had to learn to walk again after his 10-week hospital stay.

Fr Gordon Adam, Assistant Priest at King's Lynn Catholic Parish, saw Fr Michael at least twice and ministered the sacraments to him. He said: "In hospital during the pandemic, especially with routine visiting in the hospital being prohibited, the work of chaplains to help people practice their faith while experiencing serious health problems becomes more important than ever. In the most extreme cases