



## Emma's shantytown stage school dream

Award-winning Norwich soprano, **Emma Nuule**, sang her heart out on stage in the Namibian capital Windhoek recently as the latest step in her God-inspired dream to set up a performing arts school in a nearby shantytown. **Jenny Seal** reports.

**T**he 32-year old Norfolk soprano singer took to the stage for 'An Evening of Classics' in the main auditorium of UNam, the University of Namibia.

The concert was a collaboration of classical music with local baritone Paul-William Shipanga. A few days before, Emma and Paul-William were invited to appear on a morning TV show 'Good Morning Namibia' on the national television station NBC (Namibian Broadcasting Corporation) to promote the event and its cause.

The evening raised 7,000 Namibian Dollars and proved a memorable experience. "The energy in the room was just something else," said Emma. "We had invited some choirs to be involved and I was in tears; they were just amazing."

This was Emma's sixth visit to the South West African country, and coincided with a wedding in the family of her Namibian-born husband, Josef. The idea for the musical collaboration came to Emma when she first watched



Norwich soprano Emma Nuule, left, and Paul-William Shipanga, right, with beneficiaries of the concert.

Shipanga perform on YouTube and got in touch. Both share a Christian faith, a vocal talent and a deep desire to help disadvantaged people in Namibia.

"Paul-William is very inspiring in the way he talks about things," said Emma. "He wants to make the world a better place."

Alongside performing and studying full-time to be a doctor, Shipanga has founded the charity 'Reach One Serve One' which serves disadvantaged communities within Windhoek. The money raised from ticket sales went directly to the charity.

One of the charity's activities is to organise outings for those living in an elderly home to avoid isolation. For Emma one of the highlights of the concert was meeting these elders. She said: "We got

to see them to their seats. They were just so emotional. And they enjoyed having their photo taken on the red carpet. It was a moving experience."

Emma, who regularly sings arias in classical concerts across Norfolk, was struck by some cultural differences around the event in September. "The tickets and posters said the concert started at 6pm," she said. "So, I got to the venue at 5pm and they said, 'why are you here so early?'. I said, 'it starts at 6pm'. They said, 'No, not really - it starts when everyone arrives! It started at quarter to 7.'"

As well as raising funds for a good cause, the concert was a means for Emma to make local contacts within the charity and performance sectors. Some years ago, Emma and Josef bought a

piece of land in the most disadvantaged area of Windhoek. Emma has a vision to turn the piece of rubble into a performing arts school for local children.

Located on the side of a mountain, surrounded by homes made of corrugated iron sheets, she believes a stage school would benefit both the children and give a boost to the area. Emma said, "It's very basic living and quite dangerous. But the children are very talented naturally. Their voices - it's like everyone can sing. It comes from their soul."

Her frustration is the length of time it is taking to see the project take shape. "I've definitely been trying ever since I had that moment where God said you're going to set up this performing

■ Story continues on page eight.



## Gladiator for the Gospel

Warren Furman went from poverty to riches overnight when he bulked-up his body with dangerous anabolic steroid injections to become a member of the 'Gladiators' hit TV show back in the 1990s. **Sandie Shirley** reports.

■ Four years ago, Warren became a Christian through an Alpha course and he recently shared his transforming story at the Alpha launch for Christ Community Church in Attleborough.

"I came out of the rat race and began to live a life of love instead of fear. I started to relax and knew I was born for a purpose and to be a blessing. I had subscribed to a celebrity culture; it was empty, and monochrome compared with the technicolour life I have now," says Warren, who travels the world telling young and old about the saving grace that placed him on a new adventure.

His former life of fame, fortune and celebrity status that took his earnings to a massive £2,000 an hour was built on a surreal foundation of lies and vanity. "I was the perfect plastic person, a commercial product that was spiritually bankrupt - my life was a house of cards. I had a fast car, house and a number of celebrity girlfriends but I started to live with more fear, afraid of losing what I had," he told his Norfolk audience.

As a teenager, Warren wanted to bulk-up to become a high earner like his movie-star hero, Arnold Schwarzenegger. "I worked hard, lifting weights but I was still only 14 stone; I learnt that I had to use anabolic steroids. I started injecting them with a 2-inch needle into my thigh - you could not get much lower than that. The bigger the risk the higher the pay-off and I immediately began to grow like an ox; I felt like Superman at around 18 stone."

■ Story continues on page four



## GOOD NEWS

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# A different kind of Christmas

■ In my home, "Dinner is ready!" is perhaps the most welcome pronouncement on Christmas Day. It signals the start of a wonderful meal in great company amongst close family and friends. A banquet that is never rushed but always savoured. A meal like no other.

Sitting side-by-side around an extended circular table decorated with candles and crackers, we select from a spread more abundantly supplied than on any other day. And we share stories. They are well known, rehearsed every year and drawn from a vast store of embarrassing incidents to laugh over. It's a magnificent meal of fellowship, joy, laughter and acceptance.

You may be thinking that the meal is the best part of my Christmas Day but actually it's the presents. There is a child in me that still loves the afternoon when the presents are distributed. Although I know I should say the opposite, it is receiving rather than giving that I like best!

We have to wait until parents, aunts and uncles, nephews and nieces, children and grandchildren are all assembled in the lounge. Then labelled sacks are allocated and each person re-

By Andrew  
Frere-Smith,  
Development  
Worker for  
Imagine  
Norfolk  
Together



ceives one. Approximately six presents are found inside. I love it! I normally force myself to wait until everyone has opened theirs before I begin on mine. The anticipation and excitement build. My heart races! And this, even though all my gifts come from a list that I compiled myself only a few weeks before! I know what I'm going to get and still I'm captivated. Gifts are great!

Two years ago, I interviewed a guest at the night shelter in King's Lynn. She told me she had woken up one Christmas Day under a

tarpaulin outside Argos. The rain had been dripping down her back. She was uncomfortable, hungry and sad. She wanted to spend it with her family. She wanted to have Christmas at home. She wanted to be the mother who could provide for her children. She wanted to be 'normal'.

Last winter, we arranged for the night shelter to open on Christmas Day. Plans were made to make it a very special family meal. Many volunteers turned out, including the mayor, and a lovely spread was prepared. However, despite everyone's considerable efforts, it was still tinged with sadness. One of the guests had been beaten up in the town centre and his pain was felt by all. Christmas should not be like this. It was another reminder to the guests that the security and safety of a home was still beyond reach.

Christmas is a wonderful celebration, but for many, Christmas is not 'Glad tidings of comfort and joy'. It represents a very difficult time in a hostel, a hospital, in a loveless home or alone.

Maybe it's time I took my eyes off myself and did Christmas differently.

# Angels give prison joy

Inmates in a Norfolk prison will send heartfelt messages and gifts to their children to open on Christmas morning even though they are miles away, thanks to an innovative Christian project. Sandie Shirley reports.

Thanks to Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree scheme and the Diocese of Norwich Mothers' Union, inmates at Wayland Prison, near Watton, will be able to connect with their children during the festivities.

Angel Tree is founded on love and reconciliation as it aims to underpin and build on family relationships when a parent ends up in prison. When Sybil Martin first heard about the scheme, after moving to Wymondham and joining Mothers' Union, she became an ardent champion. As a retired teacher in a challenging area in London she had witnessed the dire effects suffered by a few of her class pupils who had a parent in prison.

"I still remember those children. Although the parent does the crime, the children do the time as the ripples spread out," she said.

Now Sybil helps spearhead the annual MU outreach of buying, wrapping and sending presents to ease the plight of suffering families after receiving a list of children's first names, age, gender and suggested gift from Wayland Prison, via inmates.

"We also pray for each child and there is the option to include an age-appropriate Christian story



Angel Tree parcels with Daphne Gibson (left) and Sybil Martin (right) both members of MU Norwich Diocese with former member Elisabeth Hill (centre).

and a personal hand-written gift tag from dad. It is a wonderful and rewarding scheme," explains Sybil.

"The books include gospel stories and Bible stories popular with boys such as David and Goliath and Daniel in the lion's den as well as alternatives about ethical dilemmas. They are supplied by Prison Fellowship and produced by ethical publishing houses," says Sybil.

Mothers' Union is a worldwide organisation committed to putting their faith into action, enabling and transforming lives and upholding family values. Angel Tree is one of 15 projects that is championed by

the Diocese of Norwich which covers Norfolk and NW Suffolk.

Sybil said: "It is social, and everyone is supportive of one another in our 40 branches while looking for things that need to be done in the world and our local area.

"The reoffending rate in British jails is absolutely shocking. Sometimes prisoners have homes to go back to when they get out, but often they don't. Research shows if they manage to keep in good contact with their families during the sentence, they have a better chance of not reoffending once they are

out again. It is better for the children as well. If a parent disappears to serve their jail sentence the children don't always understand.

"We know that offenders should not have committed a crime and they deserve to serve their sentence. But the children didn't do the crime and yet they suffer," said Sybil. "Angel Tree focusses on the children and eases the way for some families who are up against it."

The scheme is available to prisoners who are allowed access to their children.

[www.prisonfellowship.org.uk](http://www.prisonfellowship.org.uk)



# Faith and prayer behind award-winning school

The headteacher of an award-winning complex needs school in South Norfolk has revealed the faith and prayer that helped to win a ten-year battle to complete the £14m state-of-the-art school. **Sandie Shirley** reports.

**K**arin Heap is head of Chapel Green School in Old Buckenham and in June it was named as the East of England's "Project of the Year" at the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) Awards.

"Despite the difficulties, I never doubted in my heart that it would happen," says Karin, who will retire from her role as school leader next September when the new school reaches full capacity.

The doors to Chapel Green School first opened in January 2018 with funding from Norfolk County Council and the support of a £3.8m (approx) government grant. The blueprint was forged with input from pupils, parents and staff to signify an empowering new era. It has made learning "irresistible" for the current 104 three to 19-year olds who have a variety of moderate, severe or profound physical and mental challenges, explains Karin.

"It's a place of development and investment for children, staff and parents. You sense peace here and God's workings in the different situations as pupils' lives are changed," adds Karin who drew members of six local churches together to pray into the new school building before it opened.

With approximately 3.5 hectares, it includes a hydrotherapy pool, sensory studio, outside cycle track and all-weather pitch, kitchen garden and animal paddock. There is also a café and life skills room to practise hospitality and domestic tasks. One parent says she feels like "a lottery winner" in the way her son has flourished since joining the school a year ago.

Karin took over the headship at the original Attleborough site – Chapel Road School – in 2001. Seven years later she was determined to help raise the bar for the children she knew and loved with more space and upgraded



Karin Heap, head teacher of Chapel Green School in Old Buckenham.

facilities. It came with a passionate drive to find a new site for a purpose-built multi-faceted school where children and young adults would continue to find challenge to grow and shine and where 50 more youngsters with complex needs could join the school roll.

With other campaigners, she embarked on an ardent journey of false starts and setbacks. But she forged relations with the press to tell out the story; visited Downing Street and drew on the expertise around her while managing the day-to-day running of Chapel Road School.

The responsibility could have weighed heavy on her shoulders, but Karin's Christian faith saw her through the challenges. "I would send my prayer requests to my church, Hope Community Church Wymondham, as they carried the burdens for me in prayer," she said.

Those burdens were considerable. They included the loss of a proposed

site near Wymondham College and probate delays when the owner, who gifted the land for the school, died before the legal transference. Meanwhile there was a disappointing Ofsted report that went against the grain for a school that previously and since has been termed "Good" and "Outstanding."

"But I used the report to re-evaluate and change operations to become more systematic for a much larger school, and it helped us transition well when we moved site," says Karin.

Throughout the journey she wanted the voices of the children to be heard and she took a CD with messages from her pupils to Prime Minister David Cameron.

"A few months later, although there were no government grant allocations in 2013 for schools in Cambridgeshire or Suffolk, our little school in Norfolk was awarded nearly £4 million."

Karin recalls moving into the new

school in the first week of January 2018: "It was chaos with different workmen and stockpiles of equipment and 60 staff all moving in. We were due to open for the new term on January 15 and had invited children and parents to see the school for the first time on the Saturday before. The job was done on time – children and families were completely wowed, some were moved to tears – it was amazing."

Afterwards, a prayer meeting with staff and representatives from six cross-denominational churches was held following permission from the school governors. "Every room, and its purpose was prayed for, before approximately 40 of us gathered at the heart of the school, the atrium, holding hands to invite the Holy Spirit to work as we brought this school before God for his blessing."

Karin explains that prayer is ongoing and the rewards are many: "They include the joy of sharing laughter

and banter with children and staff or communicating with children who have the highest needs and to see them relaxed and empowered to communicate with me," says Karin. "There's more joy when I have a moment to play with them and come down the slide with them – eight at a time!"

And there are many other special, joyous moments – the first 'prom' for school summer leavers and an organised school sleepover under canvas when youngsters spent their first night away from home.

Satisfaction also comes from empowering and developing others: "When a mum wants to return to work after raising a young family, she may arrive as a lunchtime supervisor. Over the years she is built-up here and may undertake national vocational qualifications as she grows in her confidence and requires skills that eventually may lead to full-time employment at our school."

Karin's leadership comes with a Biblical perspective: "It is built on the model of the early church and what Jesus says. Working together with the different gifts and strengths in the 'Body of Christ', with love, grace and care, straight talking and fairness – it works and it enables us to make a difference."

Karin became a Christian at 12. Before leaving school, she knew she wanted to be a preacher or teacher with special needs children. "I worked and lived in children's homes in Switzerland and England and it became my mission even before university."

She was deputy head at two schools for children with special needs in Cumbria before moving to Norfolk. Says Karin: "I was the main breadwinner, and very happy with my role as deputy head. When my third child was born 20 years ago, I wanted to spend more time at home, but working part-time as a deputy head brought all sorts of challenges but these ultimately led me to finding a job as a headteacher in Attleborough.

"Looking back, it is clear to see how God has directed and guided my steps; his grace is full of abundance and he uses every challenge to turn it into something positive. It's a testimony of his unfailing love to us as individuals and his care for the most vulnerable, children with complex needs, in our society."

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# A gladiator for the Gospel

## ■ Story continued from page one

When Warren arrived for the fitness trial in the hope of making the Gladiator grade, he was 21 and living in a Christian hostel on income support. His father made him leave home because he failed to get a job and was resistant to joining the family roofing business. "My four brothers worked with my dad, but it was a hard job, living hand-to-mouth; when the weather was bad there was no money."

Warren passed the Gladiator trial after smiling throughout the ordeal to outshine the competition. "There were around 60 other bodybuilders that weighed more than me – some were from America and they took growth hormones."

Within days he was whisked away in a stretch limousine to Heathrow Airport and flew first-class to Mauritius to start training. "It was a hundred times better than winning the Lottery," he recalls.

He was known as Ace during the long-running series at peak family viewing time on a Saturday night that drew a 16 million audience. But from the outset the pressure was intense. He competed against imposing contestants, including professional stunt men keen to match their strength against the Gladiators to clinch the top prizes. "If I did not win 70% of the matches I was sacked. We filmed each series, 20 episodes, in Birmingham in a month. The rest of the year, we boosted our earnings with celebrity appearances and commercial sponsorships.

"My brothers and really good friends moved away from me. In their place were hundreds of friends eager to socialise with a TV celebrity."

Warren fed on fame, fortune and the adulation of his growing fans. He had a few celebrity girlfriends including Katie Price (formerly Jordan) but the relationships were a sham, said Warren: "We could not trust one another because we were intent on building our celebrity profile rather than genuinely investing in one another."

"Everything has a life-span, including us, and the programme ended,"

says Warren, who went on to re-invent his life. He took different jobs, settled down and had two children but there were inescapable voids and growing unease.

"I decided it was time to go on a spiritual journey. Mum and dad were angry and so was I when my baby brother died. I had been to enough churches to see they were boring and reading out of the Bible made no sense.

"But I examined the evidence for two years, looking at atheism and world religions. There were lots of morally commendable religions, but you cannot have a half-truth because it is just a lie.

"I was in a place of indecision when four years ago I was invited to an Alpha course by a rich businessman who was unlike the rich and famous people I had met before. It was not in a church context and I was able to ask about the big questions in life and people would try to give me an honest answer. But I had a hard heart; I had enjoyed the glitz and red carpet and I had been corrupted by a celebrity lifestyle.

"I was suspicious and intent on disproving the Bible, but I met God through the person of Jesus Christ and was filled with the Holy Spirit – the power of God – that gets things done."

When a clergyman prayed over Warren, he did not feel any different. "But the next week my wife saw such a change in me that she turned to prayer and was filled with the Holy Spirit too."

Warren explained: "Until then I was disconnected from God through sin, but he wanted to restore me, not condemn me. He could do something about my sin when I recognised it and the need for a Saviour in Jesus."

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



Pictured are President Carl Beech, left, and CEO Nathan Blackaby outside The Mitre in Norwich with their VW campervan.

## VW Campervan duo celebrate in Norwich

Christian men's ministry CVM is celebrated its 30th birthday with a national tour in a VW Campervan, including a recent visit to Norwich. **Kevin Gotts** reports.

**T**hirty years ago, the iconic Berlin Wall fell providing freedom and reconciliation to millions. And in the same year CVM (Christian Vision for Men) was formed in Chesterfield, to connect with men and help break down the reasons why many men did not connect with church.

Three decades on, this national evangelistic men's movement has been celebrating this Big 30 with a host of initiatives to thank and involve the 500 member groups including Norwich.

Carl Beech (president) and Nathan Blackaby (CEO) took to the road in a classic VW Campervan to travel from Edinburgh to Essex from September 16-22. Their route took in 16 key locations - in Norwich a group of members and guests enjoyed breakfast, conversation and shared experiences at the Mitre community café.

Nathan was very enthusiastic with the reaction to this Grand Tour, "It has been very positive, we have had good meetings with people and seen men come to faith. Often men's work can be a lonely process, so we are here to encourage," he said. "Norwich is an area where we wanted to come to. We have a strong partnership with a group who enjoy the resources and attend the national men's festival The Gathering."

There is a serious side to CVM's work. CVM says that "Suicide is the most common cause of death for men under age 50, and that the least likely to attend church are young single working-class men." They have a vision of introducing one million men to Jesus.

Carl said: "Thousands of men turn up every week throughout the UK and in over a dozen other nations doing evangelistic activities, getting alongside their mates and having fun. And The Gathering will turn 10 years old in 2020. This is a fusion between Top Gear and Songs of Praise. Members come along with their unchurched mates to enjoy live comedy, cool cars, a beer festival, live music, relevant Bible teaching and loads more."

The CVM team are doing a tour of the UK in 2020 to promote their revamped Code Life material, a 12-point honour code that has proven to be a powerful tool among men to connect with God's word.

Duncan MacInnes from Norwich said: "It was great to sit down with Carl and Nathan and enjoy breakfast. These guys are amazing in what they do with men's ministry in the UK."

For more details: please contact Stephen Gladwell, CVM Norwich Area Coordinator, at [stephen.gladwell@cvm.org.uk](mailto:stephen.gladwell@cvm.org.uk)  
[www.CVM.org.uk](http://www.CVM.org.uk)



# Show aims to bring joy at Christmas

Norwich church Proclaimers is once again running its popular Spectacular Christmas Concert this year with three separate free performances.

**T**his year, it's called "Joy", a title inspired by the Christmas favourite "Joy To the World"; with a major theme being the impact of Christmas around the world.

Pastor Tom Rawls said: "Year after year, our team at Proclaimers find ways to make an impact on our city with the simple message of Christmas. This year will be no different. The concert will be fresh, creative and inspirational – with the team performing never before seen arrangements of some of our favourite Christmas songs.

"A truly global experience, we've drawn inspiration from around the world – with an item infused with the creole cool of the great city of New Orleans, another that's a fresh approach to a Spanish favourite that is loved in the USA, and some classic carols given fresh life through a creative new approach. To top it all, there's a show-stopping African medley that just has to be experienced in person. It may

well be our best performance ever," said Tom.

"Over the years, we've heard so many people say our productions are uplifting, inspirational and inspiring. We've even heard people say it is the best Christmas concert they've ever seen. So you can let your imagination run wild, and even then you'll probably be surprised by what you experience! With skilled musicians and singers, energetic dancers, professional lighting, dazzling decorations, a separate high quality programme for the kids, mince pies and festive beverages, plus a short, inspiring message, there is something for everyone to enjoy.

"It is no exaggeration to say that this year's Christmas Concert will be incredible. So come along. Bring your family. Bring some friends. Entrance is free and there is ample free parking too. This really is an event not to be missed," said Tom.

## Proclaimers 'Joy'

■ There are three performances:  
Saturday December 14, at 5pm  
Sunday December 15 at 10:30am and 5pm

■ Venue: The Space, Roundtree Way, Norwich, NR7 8SQ.

■ There is ample free parking

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Pictured are performers in last year's Proclaimers Christmas Concert.





# Inner calm is No 1 issue for people

A lack of personal peace and inner calm in people's lives is the number one issue for them, believes Norwich-based Christian counsellor, author and church pastor John Clements. Kevin Gotts reports.

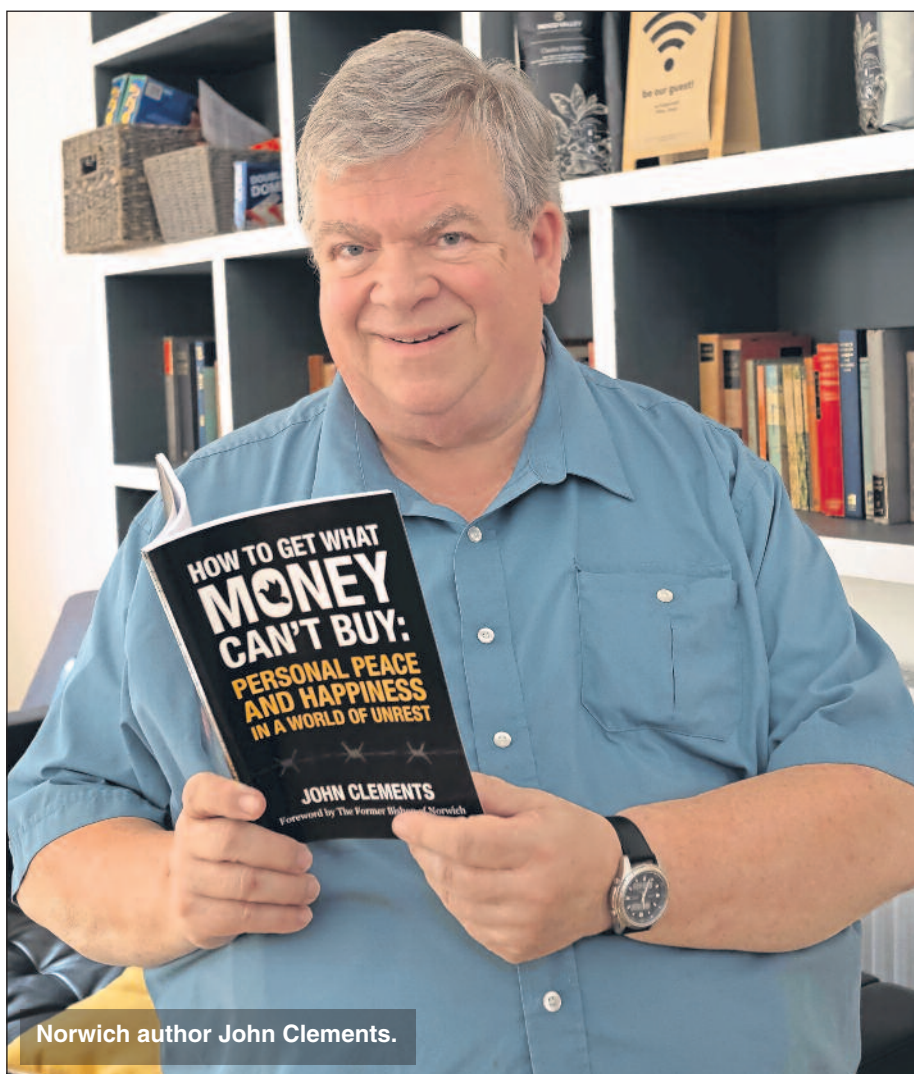
■ John says: "Without peace it is very hard to be happy in life. The pursuit of happiness can be as fruitless as a dog trying to catch its tail! I don't have all the national statistics, but in 2017 the NHS referred 1.4 million people for talking therapies for anxiety and stress."

"Since 2006 it is reported that there has been a 108.5% increase in anti-depressants dispensed by pharmacies in the UK. Sadly, both Christian and non-Christian people suffer and go to endless lengths to find personal peace and happiness. Sometimes pills can help, but they don't change people's lives like a relationship with Jesus Christ," says John.

In 2008, he felt that God inspired him to write a book 'How to Get What Money Can't Buy: Personal Peace and Happiness in a World of Unrest'. It is an illustrated book where he skilfully blends biblical truth, quotations and prayers with modern psychology, designed to be practical and applicable to everyday lives. He was not able to find a national publisher, so he had to take a step of faith and self-publish.

John continues, "This little book has just had its sixth edition published and has sold over 1,000 copies. Many people who have bought it have also bought copies to give to their friends. Some have told me that they keep a copy next to their Bible. Everyone has told me that reading it inspired them."

Former Bishop of Norwich, Graham James, who recently retired, wrote the foreword. People including Pam Rhodes from



Norwich author John Clements.

the BBC, Canon J John, Director of the Philo Trust, Dave Bilbrough, singer-songwriter best known for songs like Abba Father and All Hail the Lamb and, encouragingly, Susan Boyle, the international singer have endorsed it.

Readers can obtain a paperback copy by

visiting [www.oldmeetinghousechurch.org.uk](http://www.oldmeetinghousechurch.org.uk) where you can pay using PayPal. This illustrated, devotional book costs £10.95 + £1.25 for P&P. There is also a Kindle edition available on Amazon. If you want further details, please contact John on [john@drjohnclements.com](mailto:john@drjohnclements.com)

# Putting



The Wonder at Soul Church

# Astonishing g

Christian magician **Steve Price** will be performing his astonishing 'gospel magic' show at a Norwich church on December 7. **Helen Baldry** reports.

**A** past secretary of The Magic Circle, Steve is one of the UK's busiest and most established magicians. His desire is to amaze and amuse his audience, and at the show at Norwich Central Baptist Church he will share his Christian faith as part of the performance.

At the age of ten, Steve was given a Paul Daniels magic set, which sparked an interest in the concept. Over the years, he honed his tricks, comedy and sleight of hand, became a full-time professional performer and his show has won him The Magic

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# on a show for Christmas

Churches across Norwich and Norfolk are pulling out all the stops this year to produce all-singing, all-dancing, professional standard stage productions to tell the Christmas story in innovative ways.

**F**ollowing huge demand last Christmas, churches are even adding extra shows to their festive schedules.

## Christmas Alive

■ The Bethlehem Nativity Village returns to Ashill on December 14 and 15, as the Fountain of Life church is transformed into 'Christmas Alive'. Travel back in time to experience Roman soldiers barking out orders, traditional wood crafts and weaving, flatbreads cooking on open fires, donkeys in the stables and Jewish dancing.

Visitors can wander round the Nativity Village and sample authentic food and drink. The sights, sounds and aromas make it a truly immersive experience. Alongside the nativity village, a top class musical production of Scrooge Reworked



Christmas Alive in Ashill features a Nativity Village.

will be shown in matinee and evening performances.

**Saturday December 14 and Sunday December 15**

**Nativity Village open 3pm – 6pm**

**Scrooge Reworked matinee 3pm, evening 6pm**

**Venue: Fountain of Life Church, Swaffham**

**Road, Ashill, IP25 7BT**

**Book your free ticket at**

**[registration@folchurch.co.uk](mailto:registration@folchurch.co.uk) or on 01760 441902**

## The Wonder

■ Eagerly anticipated, Soul Church's Christmas

production The Wonder is back for 2019 with a massive 14 performances across two weekends.

The musical extravaganza promises to be even bigger and better this year. Senior Pastor Jon Norman describes the show as 'our gift to Norwich'. As many people as possible are invited to come along and celebrate the true meaning of Christmas.

**Saturday December 7 – 10am, 1pm, 4pm, 7pm**

**Sunday December 8 – 10am, 1pm, 4pm**

**Saturday December 14 – 10am, 1pm, 4pm, 7pm**

**Sunday December 15 – 10am, 1pm, 4pm**

**Venue: Soul Church, 4 Mason Road, Norwich, NR6 6RF**

**[www.soulchurch.com](http://www.soulchurch.com)**

**Free of charge, no booking required**

## Steve Price Magic Show

■ Norwich Central Baptist Church is hosting Christian Magician Steve Price for an afternoon of entertainment and gospel magic. Suitable for anyone aged 7 and over, the afternoon promises to be a treat with a top class performance of Steve's astonishing tricks and comedy, with a message of faith weaved in to the show.

**Saturday December 7 at 2pm**

**Venue: Norwich Central Baptist Church, Duke Street, Norwich NR3 3AP**

**Tickets £3 in advance or £5 on the door**

**[www.norwichcentral.org](http://www.norwichcentral.org) 01603 760497**

# ospel magic at church

Circle's Originality Prize.

Steve said, "I was brought up in a Christian family, so I was taken to church for many years. When I went to university in Loughborough, I then had the choice - do I want to make this faith my own? I'm pleased to say that I did, and my church in Loughborough was a place where my faith went from strength to strength."

Steve builds up a rapport with his audience throughout his performance and uses it as an opportunity to talk about faith. Some Christians are wary of performers who term themselves 'magicians' but Steve says most people understand what they are seeing is not 'real' but a clever trick. He explains how he started to weave in the gospel message to his performance.

"When I was about 21 years old, I met up with a Christian magician. He explained how he used tricks and illusions to share the Good News. He suggested that I take six months to put a show together, taking the tricks I already performed and putting a relevant message to them. Getting the balance between performing and sharing my faith is delicate, but if I can entertain and engage an audience I find that they're attentive to what I have to say."

Steve's primary purpose is to enthrall the audience and he is delighted when people respond to his message. He said, "Usually when I'm at a Christian event, I'll invite people to take postcards that briefly outline the Christian faith and invite people to send off for a free copy of Mark's gospel. I'm often thrilled at how many cards are taken. I also have stories from church leaders about how my show has been significant in their outreach to particular individuals."

Steve has over 15 years of performing experience and has worked at thousands of venues around the world, including Paris, St Petersburg and New York



Steve Price.

and the Arctic Circle. He and his wife Alice have attended St Francis Church in South Croydon for 11 years and are soon moving to the Wirral. Steve is pleased to return to Norfolk for the church's Christmas show. He said, "I've performed in Norfolk before, in fact, several times in Cromer and Sheringham. The furthest place I've performed has to be Easter Island. It took about six days to get there!"

So what skills do you need if you want to try gospel magic? Steve says the most important skills are "people skills" – being confident; being able to make eye contact; being able to communicate clearly. He said, "You might take these for granted, but so many performers think it's all about the trick, that they forget the primary purpose – to entertain, and, if appropriate, share the Gospel."

Come and see Steve Price perform at Norwich Central Baptist Church on Saturday December 7 at 2pm Tickets cost £3 in advance or £5 on the door. His show is suitable for ages 7 and over. Ring 01603 760497 or visit: [www.norwichcentral.org](http://www.norwichcentral.org)

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## Emma's stage school dream

■ Story continued from page one

school," she said. "The only thing stopping me is money, which is really frustrating. But money can come. God can make money appear. I just need a roof and I can build it up from there. It's hot. You don't need walls like you do here!"

Emma who dresses in beautiful ballgowns to perform, admits: "It's a real contrast. I love glamour and I love performing but I would love to live a pared-down life in Namibia. I love it there. The lifestyle – the way that families come together. You're always around people. I like being around people!"

In 2014, Emma won the global 'Serco's Got Talent' competition and in 2018 she won one of the UK's longest-running talent competitions 'Search for a Star' in Longbridge. Emma and Josef used the prize money to buy a taxi in Namibia which they have hired out to a local driver, the first step in setting up an income stream to allow them to live there.

Her next step is to register a charity in Namibia and set about fundraising so planning can start on the design and build of the school structure. "I don't want to do it when I'm really old," she said. "I want to do it when I've still got energy."

In early 2019, Emma gave birth to her third child, Faith. In May she released a new album, The Passion, and this year she has also performed at events such as the Gorleston Clifftop Festival. It's clear Emma still has a lot of energy to make it happen.

If you would like to come alongside Emma and help her achieve her dream of setting up a performing arts school for disadvantaged children in Namibia she would welcome assistance. Please contact her at [emmanuule@gmail.com](mailto:emmanuule@gmail.com)

Something new is happening on the North Lynn housing estate in **King's Lynn** as local people come together to explore the Christian faith using Pilates, emojis and Google searches. **Jenny Seal** visited to find out more.



The Solace group including Rev Becca Rogers (standing second right).

# Pilates, emojis and Google

**E**very Wednesday morning, a group of people from North Lynn meet to explore the Christian faith. There is no planned topic, no sermon or pre-prepared notes and no pre-selected songs. Instead, they have created their own way and it is leading to deep discussion about God, the Bible and their lives.

Rev Becca Rogers has been one of the Ministers of North Lynn Methodist Church since 2015. With an unimposing building in the middle of one of the most deprived wards in the country, North Lynn Methodist Church has a small congregation who work hard to serve their neighbours. Each week they host a weekly community meal and other activities such as 'coffee on the couch'.

Noticing that there were regulars to these social activities who rarely or never came to Sunday services, Becca was keen to offer a way they could explore faith that wasn't 'too churchy'.

"The culture of how we do church for some people is just a huge barrier," she said. "We are expecting people to jump over that barrier before we even get to the talking about God."

Becca, along with James Hawksworth, the Church Army Officer in King's Lynn, invited a group to think about how they might like to explore faith in a new way. Becca said: "There was a mix of both church members and those who came to church activities but wouldn't call themselves Christians." The only proviso was that the group had to involve the Bible; otherwise, they were given free rein.

In May the new group 'Solace' was launched, meeting on Wednesdays from 9.30am-11am. They start with 30 minutes of Pilates. Becca explained: "In our first discussion someone said that the lives of people who live around here are pretty busy and stressful, and often people are just rushed off their feet. So, before anybody can even begin to think about any God stuff, they need to be relaxed."

Mats and cushions are placed on the floor and a Darcey Bussell Pilates DVD is played on the big screen. About half the group take off their shoes and stretch into positions such as the sphinx. Those who are unable or don't want to, sit around the edge quietly listening to the soothing music and occasionally texting each other.

Once relaxed, the group gather around a table with hot drinks, Bibles and a large sheet of blank paper. A different person takes the lead each week using laminated cards printed with a series of questions and prayers. The first question, 'How are you today?', is accompanied by a sheet of emojis.

There are around a dozen in the group; both men and women, single people, parents and grandparents, professionals and those out of work. "There is a mix of people who are signed-up believers and people who are not sure yet, but everyone is searching," said Becca.

There is a warmth and friendliness, and in the chatty, fun atmosphere everyone is equal and listened to. Some select an emoticon and others simply give news of their children, grandchildren, their work and their health, before a short prayer is read out asking for peace and focus.

Felt tip pens are then given out and everyone is invited to write down a topic for discussion. Without explanation or preamble, topics like thankfulness, anxiety, love, hope, celebration, frustration, giving and joy are written down. The group vote on which to discuss. Becca explains, "You can vote on as many topics as you like, and you can vote on your own."

Once decided, people are given five minutes to research the chosen topic using their tablet or phone, the Bibles or the Bible concordance. They write down verses, thoughts and examples on the sheet.

Becca said: "Then we talk about those Bible passages we have found, and we also talk about our lives."

In a discussion on 'how God provides' the conversation is wide-ranging, spontaneous and insightful. In 30 minutes we talk about creation and growing our own food, answers to prayer and God coming through in difficult situations, the charge on mobility scooters and spiritual sustenance. Passages are found from the Feeding of the 5000, the Sermon on the Mount, Hebrews 13 and Philippians 4.

Becca said: "Sometimes as a vicar, I get a bit twitchy and I'm thinking, 'is this really a good way of looking at the Bible; it's not a three-point sermon!' But actually, in the conversations that we have, the sharing has been amazing. People have shared what for them is going on at the time and we have really deep faith conversations."

Towards the end, Becca asks: "Has anyone got a song that would fit with the theme?" and on her phone someone selects the perfectly suited 'God Provides' by Gospel singer Tamela Mann. Becca prays and the group disperse, clearly encouraged and uplifted by the morning.

"It's a good thing to be part of," said Becca.

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# Meeting God in a police cell

**R**obert shared the realities of gang life and knife crime at the Norfolk Broads Filling Station in Hickling on October 14.

Showing an earlier family photograph of him as a child with his parents, he said: "My mum and dad were great, but my dad was a drug dealer, and there were two events that affected my life.

"Firstly, I had a computer game that I expected to play as usual, but the computer and game were sold by my dad to buy drugs he had started to use and, secondly, was life without him at home," explained Robert.

"He was sentenced to prison and later went to a Christian-based drug rehabilitation centre and became a born-again Christian.

"After a year he returned as a better father. My parents started a rehab where lives were changed and saved by God's grace. Dad was tough on me with discipline. I became angry with him and God, so I made the choice to make dad angry."

Robert had sporting success at school with football and boxing: "as I enjoyed hurting people," he said. Eventually he was

Former teenage knife-carrying gang member **Robert Bragg** told a Norfolk audience how an encounter with God in a police cell helped him to give up a life of violence and crime. **Kevin Gotts** reports.

expelled from three schools.

At the age of 12, he was invited to join a gang where he wanted to fit in and became involved in crime, including his first stabbing.

Aged 13, Robert got more embroiled as older gang members encouraged him to burgle and rob and he made lots of money selling drugs.

A year later Robert was homeless after running away from home. He was abused by an older man whom he had trusted, after smoking a cannabis splif which,

unknown to Robert, had been laced with hard drugs.

"I had no one to speak to, I held it in and became emotionally detached and all that, angry and confused, and being violent made me feel masculine and better," said Robert.

Rhetorically he asks, "Was it worth it? No," he said. And aged 15 he went to a young offenders' institute and then a variety of prisons for most of the next six years, where he found life tough.

"I believed that carrying a knife kept me safe, then there was a scary moment when a friend died. A knife does not keep you safe, sooner or later it gets used on you."

Robert showed a hashtag which reads #thinkalifenotaknife.

Sitting in a police cell, he reflected on how he had messed up his whole life with poor choices, as well as being a poor teenage father himself. On release, he returned to his father's church, saying: "God if you are real, help me. God came, I felt warmth, cried and broke down."

The next day he left the gang but continued his criminal life for two more years. Asking for his dad's help, and after release on licence, Robert went to the faith-based

Victory Outreach programme in Dublin, Ireland. And then he spent six months at a Bible School in the USA.

Robert tells of a prophecy: "God said, go back and tell them (former gang members) there is a way out."

He was able to do this on the streets in London and to speak of his life and God's love to a group of 200 gang members within a church in prison.

"What really matters?" Robert reflected. "Family matters, especially my oldest son - where I missed six years of his life while in prison."

"Life's great now, I also have a younger son, God has restored my relationship with my mum and dad. They believed in me and stood in the gap praying for me for over 11 years and never gave up."

Robert now works with a charity, Uprising Youth & Community, which connects with young people, families and those on the margins of society, including running workshops and training parents and teachers.

He also has responsibility for sharing his story with schools in Kent about knife crime and gang culture.

■ Image by Ichigo121212 from Pixabay.



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Pictured are Dinger and Miriam from Peru (centre) with the Caleb Men's Group in Norwich.



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[www.lifestories.org.uk](http://www.lifestories.org.uk)



**A monthly Christian men's group has been set up in Norwich, inspired by a question from a leader of women's Bible study Zoë Group. Kevin Gotts reports.**

■ Karen Joyce asked her husband Rod and his friend David Riddington, "Why not set up a group for men?"

Rod then met and prayed with some other Christian men from across Norwich, formed a leadership team, and started Caleb, inviting men from different churches in and around Norwich who have a desire to live wholeheartedly for God in their everyday lives.

Meeting at Witard Road Baptist Church, Caleb monthly meetings on the third Saturday of each month now provide men with a place to meet, worship, study God's Word and grow.

They emphasize the importance of laid-back discussion, providing a non-threatening space for guys to talk about life and issues of faith.

"I enjoy the times I can get along, mixing with and taking time out with other men. The worship and the speakers (live or on video) are a real encouragement," said Ian.

Twice a year, Caleb host a breakfast with an inspirational speaker designed to appeal to friends and guests who wouldn't normally come.

Recently, a couple from Peru, Dinger and his wife Miriam, shared their experiences of imprisonment and release, and an ongoing ministry of supporting those in prison or who have been released.

David Riddington, said: "It is clear that people value the discussions and the things that come out of it, which they don't get normally at church."

Martin, who has been attending for about a year explains: "I like the fellowship and modern songs, which are spiritually uplifting. Particularly as I am a late convert to Christianity."

A founder leader, David Adams, said: "Men are free to invite other men, it's very informal. Coffee is from 8.30am, for a 9am start and we always finish by 11am."

More details: [www.calebwftl.org.uk](http://www.calebwftl.org.uk)

# Isaac's

The journey from an African campfire to a role as a church minister on a Norwich housing estate has been full of unexpected twists and turns for Zimbabwean Isaac Sibanda. Jenny Seal reports.

Isaac planned to pursue a high-earning career until one night sitting around a campfire in Uganda he realized God was calling him to become a vicar. In June Isaac was ordained at Norwich Cathedral and now the 35-year old is a Curate (assistant minister) of St Francis Church serving the Heartsease estate.

Growing up in Zimbabwe his parents took him to church, worked hard and sent him to private school. Then in 2002, with fear and violence increasing in the country, Isaac's family emigrated to England.

"I was this 18-year old African boy who had gone to private school and spoke the Queen's English landing in Liverpool of all places!" he said. "That was a culture shock. I remember saying, 'what is that language?'. I couldn't understand what people were saying!"

The church played an important role in helping the teenager adjust. "You are in a new place, a new country, you are trying to figure out who you are. I got stuck into the youthwork at church and that was the start of trying to reinvent myself."

He chose to study International Business at university in Manchester and ended up being President of his Christian Union. But while his friends talked about going into ordained ministry with the Church of England he had other plans.

"I couldn't think of anything worse," he said laughing. "I was like a) that sounds very boring, b) I want to make a lot of money and have a decent career and c) I am just not cool enough! It was literally the cool kids who were all thinking about getting ordained!"

He planned to go into finance, but his final year coincided with the financial crisis of 2007-8. "I had a big 'looking in the mirror' moment," he said. "I felt like that's what I was being prepared to do but I couldn't make that step. In the US, single mothers were losing their homes. I thought, 'do I really want to be a part of that?'"

Instead, wanting to help people but still make money, Isaac decided to become a lawyer and started a post-grad law conversion course. It was expensive and proved difficult to do alongside a part-time job. After a year he dropped out.

"I felt like I hit rock bottom," he said. "I'd done my degree and all of a sudden I hadn't moved onto the next stage of life. I had nothing to do and I slumped into a depression."

Someone suggested he volunteered so he did, spending a year with Youth for Christ in The Wirral. It was here he met his wife Rebecca who was studying youthwork at Chester University.

"Rebecca suggested that I apply for a youthwork job and I was offered a 3-year contract with the Methodist Circuit in Cheshire. But in my head, I still wanted to finish off my law degree and get my career back on track. 'I was like okay Lord, three years it is and then we'll get back on the career path'."

Isaac thrived in the role. "It was such a blessing," he said. "Towards the end of the first year a lot of people started to say, 'you clearly enjoy this, and we can see God working in your life, have you thought about ordained ministry?'"



# heart for Heartsease



Rev Isaac Sibanda outside  
St Francis Church at  
Heartsease in Norwich.

And I was like 'no, that's for cool kids. I've got a career plan. I like nice cars. I want to make money'."

With a group of young people from Nantwich, Isaac was able to organise a mission trip to Uganda. They spent time visiting the charity Kids Club Kampala and then a school in a remote village.

"Every night we took turns to lead a devotional," said Isaac. "When it was my turn, I felt really prompted that we should share Communion. In the afternoon I went and bought a sweet bun and something that resembled Vimto. That night sitting around a campfire I read some liturgy and we all shared the bread and the Vimto. It was beautiful. That was the lightbulb moment for me. I came back and said to Becky, 'I feel that God is calling me to ministry'. She replied, 'I knew that all along'."

"I went from a place of 'I don't want to do this' to feeling God wants me to do this, I want to do this now. I couldn't imagine doing anything else and it just grew stronger and stronger."

By this time Rebecca was living in Norfolk having taken a job with the Salvation Army and Isaac moved to be with her. He started the process of applying for ordination with the Diocese of Norwich.

Things went well until Isaac got to the Bishop's Advisory Panel which assesses candidates for ministerial training. He was not recommended for ordination. "That was tough," said Isaac. "All of a sudden you have that moment where you start doubting yourself and God."

Isaac's Diocesan Director of Ordinands, who had supported him through the process, advised him not to give up. He had three more

interviews with examining chaplains, and just in time for the start of the academic year, the Bishop recommended him for training. He and Rebecca moved to Durham to begin his training at Cranmer Hall.

Unfortunately, Isaac's time at Cranmer Hall started and ended in hospital. Diagnosed with sickle cell disease at birth, Isaac is periodically hospitalised with pain and other complications. He had a sickle cell crisis in the months before graduating from Durham, and was out of action for almost two months with a chest infection and a lot of pain.

In 2018, Isaac and Rebecca moved back to Norfolk, and he began work at St Francis Church in the middle of the Heartsease estate in north Norwich. Isaac believes his health condition and his setbacks have prepared him well for his current role, giving him more empathy for those within the local community who are in need. "It has changed how I approach people with disability and other limiting factors in life," he said.

In June 2019, Isaac was ordained as a priest at a ceremony at Norwich Cathedral and he is now the Curate of St Francis Church. "We have a small congregation but we punch above our weight," Isaac said. "We do so much. We have this great involvement with the community through our lunch club, our growing group for toddlers and their carers, our Community Fridge and our healthy living projects."

Living with a chronic health condition means that while Isaac takes joy in growing relationships and serving people in the local community, he is also mindful about his energy levels and taking time for his hobbies. Drone photography, flying model airplanes and clay pigeon shooting are among his pastimes.

"When I fly my model airplanes or if I'm shooting grouse or clays I wear my dog collar, and people smile at me. They probably think it's weird, but I have some brilliant conversations. People don't expect a vicar to be walking around with a shotgun," he said.

## Give a Christmas present to homeless

■ The Great Yarmouth Open Christmas meal, for homeless and vulnerable people in the town, will be held at the town's Minster on December 25 and organisers are appealing for people to donate presents for the guests.

The event has been running for 21 years and is organised by volunteers with the help of donations. It always takes place on Christmas Day and includes a Christmas dinner with all the trimmings, entertainment and transport for those who need it.

Organisers plan to have wrapped gifts on the table so that everybody attending receives a present.

There is a lot of goodwill in the town and support for the event. Open Christmas volunteers will cook the meals in the kitchen at the Priory Centre and host the event in the northern aisle of the Minster. The council is supplying equipment including chairs and tables.

The drop-in event will take place between 11.30am and 3pm, with Christmas lunch served for about 400 people between 12.30pm and 2pm.

How you can get involved:

■ Donate presents for the guests of Open Christmas, they can be dropped off at the Town Hall, the Priory Centre or the Minster marked 'Open Christmas'. The presents should be 'secret santa' style gifts and wrapped and marked for a male, female, boy or girl. No alcohol please.

■ Donate tinned and packet food, such as tinned vegetables, fruit, biscuits and sweets are welcomed for goodie bags to give to guests at the end of the day.

■ Yarmouth Open Christmas is also looking for entertainers. Are you part of choir? Can you play an instrument, play the piano, tell jokes? If you can help, please get in touch.

■ Organisers are looking for a minibus with a wheelchair lift to use on the day.

[www.openchristmasgreatyarmouth.org](http://www.openchristmasgreatyarmouth.org)

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# Family's mission history

Three generations of **Nesta Volle's** family have all chosen to leave their country and live in another part of the world, sharing the Christian faith. After 40 years as Christian missionaries in Italy, Nesta and her husband **Paul** now live in Dereham, still keen to share their love of God. **Jenny Seal** reports.

Nesta and Paul Volle at Eckling Grange in Dereham.



**W**hen Nesta Volle was five years old, her family left Birmingham and set out for India. Her father was to work as a missionary in the administration of a Christian leprosy hospital in Andhra Pradesh.

Nesta remembers travelling into India and the border authorities demanding more money than expected, leaving the family unable to buy

food for the rest of their journey.

Nesta said: "We were on this train and suddenly through the window, someone put loads of bread in for us. We never knew who it was, but we ate the bread". This simple story of God's provision is one that Nesta has seen repeated throughout her life as a Christian missionary.

Her family returned from India five years later in time for the children to go to secondary school in the UK. When Nesta left school, she trained as a comptometer operator and then a few years later as a nurse and midwife. When she was 23 Nesta chose to go to Bible College.

"When I was at Bible School lots of people had ideas of what the Lord wanted them to do, and I kept saying, 'you haven't told me anything Lord.' Then I went to Italy and each step was planned out to the next step, and then at the next. So I didn't have a big boom of a calling but little by little the Lord led me and doors kept opening."

In the summer of her second year at Bible College, Nesta went to Italy with the Christian organisation, Operation Mobilisation (OM). She returned the following summer and, having finished Bible College, an English missionary family living in Reggio Emilia invited her to stay on and help them with the children and around the home. Nesta did but quickly became frustrated.

"I needed to do something different," she said. "Then out of the blue, I got a letter from an Italian nurse who asked me to go to a Christian hospital in Naples. They were looking for Christian nurses. She had got my name from a Dutch girl that had been with me at Bible College in Wales... a bit of a rigmarole!"

Nesta moved to Naples and, working in the hospital, quickly learnt the language. In her holidays she attended retreats and conferences held by Operation Mobilisation and met Paul, an American, on the OM team. She said: "After I'd been working in the hospital for three years, we got married. Paul had been working in Pisa, so I went there."

They moved to Colle Val d'Elsa in Tuscany and raised their two children, who have also become Christian missionaries, one in America and one in the Far East. "Our children have always grown up being involved in mission," she said. "In the summer we would have 20 or 25 young people come on a team from OM to help with evangelism. Our children grew up in that atmosphere."

In Tuscany, with help from others in ministry, they started a church with just one Christian family living there. The church grew as they led children's meetings, women's meetings, tent evangelism and park evangelism in the summer, always encouraging young people to get involved in mission.

"We stayed there a good many years until the

church was built up," said Nesta. "And from that church, a young couple started a church in Siena and now there are about 80 or so in the church there."

Although they received gifts of support from their home churches, Paul and Nesta didn't receive a wage or a guaranteed income. She said: "All through our lives we found the Lord has been faithful in supporting us in so many ways. That is our testimony. It keeps you alive spiritually trusting the Lord that he will supply your needs."

Nesta recalls a time when they had to move house to be where God was leading them to start a church. She said: "We found a flat in a 14th century building, but the owner wanted six months' rent in advance. But we did not have the money. One of the Singaporeans who had been on the summer team sent us a gift not knowing our need and we were able to do the rental agreement in time for our child to start school in the town."

In 2011 Paul and Nesta decided to leave Italy. They were getting older, their children had left the country and they didn't want to become a burden on their friends. They heard about Eckling Grange in Dereham, originally a retirement home and complex for missionaries, and came to look round.

"We felt this was ideal for us," said Nesta. "After a month, they said 'we've got a place for you'. We couldn't pack up 40 years of work just like that, plus our daughter was getting married in Asia and having a reception in Italy! We said, 'oh we're sorry we can't come that soon."

"Eventually when we came, we received such a warm welcome, we just felt at home. Coming from the family-orientated place that Italy is to here, was a Godsend."

Paul, who has always loved to share the story of Jesus with those who don't know it, goes to the housing estates near Eckling Grange, knocking door to door to talk to people. "He goes back to those who show interest, giving them other Gospel literature and possibly a Gospel calendar to read every day," said Nesta.

They are both involved in the Prison Fellowship at HMP Wayland and have recently started to help with the Sycamore Tree course, a six-week accredited course in restorative justice. Nesta plays the piano at the Eckling Grange Sunday service and loves to encourage people.

"In all my journeys I have seen God's faithfulness and God's provision in so many ways," she said.



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