



Bridget's refugee mission in Mexico

Norwich nurse **Bridget Carroll** has run away with a circus, worked in an army hospital and now has just started work as a missionary nurse on the Mexico/USA border. **Eldred Willey** reports.

Bridget Carroll, who until recently was worshipping at St Stephen's church in Norwich, is now working at a mission station on a site donated by a Christian convert who used to be a member of a drugs cartel. Working with refugees and asylum-seekers, she is right on the northern border of Mexico at Reynosa, some 50 metres away from the United States on the other side of the river.

The neighbourhood is characterised by drugs, people trafficking and violence. For Bridget, getting a car will be essential, because taxi drivers refuse to go there, and walking or using public transport is out of the question.

To others it might seem unappealing, but to her it is the culmination of a lifetime of training and dreaming.

Bridget comes from a well-known Norfolk family: her father, Peter, founded the Christian conference centre at Letton Hall. The family moved there when she was 12 and her brothers were teenagers, Peter having raised the finances by running a furniture factory in Kent.

The farming family which had owned Letton Hall neglected the upkeep. It was cold and full of dry rot, and the many leaks from the roof were solved by putting buckets underneath. But the family was on a mission, and they turned it around, the brothers laying down the now-famous go-kart track.

Six months into the project tragedy struck. Bridget's mother had been suffering from coeliac disease, but now she suddenly developed an aggressive cancer, and within weeks she was gone. "I was very angry with God," said Bridget. "We had moved here with nothing for miles around, people were praying – and then this."

The downward spiral began. Bridget's academic work gradually fell apart, and



she failed her A levels. "I was looking for love in all the wrong places," she said. She took a 'gap year', went to Australia and ran away with a circus.

"It was the darkest year of my life," she said. "Everybody in the circus was running away from something, and there were some very nasty people."

Drugs, immorality, fighting – in a strange way, it was a training ground for what was coming in Mexico. It was also, ironically, where she found her vocation. She was mopping up blood one day in a bar when someone said to her: "You should be a nurse."

She came back to England and trained to be a Registered General Nurse. She loved

the job, and the job loved her. Soon she was climbing the career ladder and got a job at Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital.

"On the surface it looked as if I had everything," she said. "A flat in London, a great social life, good holidays. But on the inside, I was screaming and empty. Going to church made me cry, and it was easier to stay away. I had a string of bad relationships, which would always end in tears."

In the end, she burnt out, and in her thirties decided to take a second 'gap year'. By now she had discovered scuba diving, which set the itinerary for her: Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Costa Rica, the Cook Islands, Vanuatu, Tonga, New Zealand,

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Final show for Norwich Community Gospel Choir

After five years, 150 rehearsals and dozens of joyful performances, the **Norwich Community Gospel Choir** is set to give its final concert on April 1.

■ The Norwich Community Gospel Choir (NCGC) was established in the summer of 2018 by Megan Rawling, born out of her passion to bring people together through singing. Megan said, "It felt like quite a leap at the time – leaving my sensible choral director job to launch a new citywide project with no clue if it would sink or swim."

The choir proved to be highly successful, meeting at several locations across the city for rehearsals, and numerous performances, including at Celebrate Norwich and annual Christmas events, plus a weekend choir retreat and creatively adapting throughout the pandemic.

Megan said, "The people we have met, the performances we've put on, the friendships we've seen form, the glimpses of people's faith journeys we've been privileged to see over the last nearly-five years, have made running NCGC one of the great joys of my life so far."

"I am so grateful to every single person who has been involved, however great or small the ways and for however long."

Megan will shortly be leaving Norwich to begin a new gospel-based music adventures in Darlington, County Durham. The choir is preparing for a farewell concert which will be a celebration of all they have achieved over the last five years.

The concert will take place at St Stephen's Church, Norwich on April 1. Doors will open at 4.30pm for cream tea, and the concert will begin thereafter.

Tickets are £15 full price/£10 concessions, and are available by emailing hello@ncgc.org.uk.



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GOOD NEWS

FOR NORWICH & NORFOLK

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Waveney Valley curate **James Shelton** is launching a new ministry around the practice of pilgrimage. **Helen Baldry reports.**



Rev James Shelton on the Holy Island of Iona.

James suggests taking a walk with significance

James has been inspired by the concept of pilgrimage during time spent at All Hallows convent in Ditchingham as well as the Via Beata pilgrim way, a walking route of 400 miles across the UK spanning Norfolk to Wales.

A pilgrimage is a journey to a holy place as an act of devotion. Pilgrimage is more than simply going for a walk – it is a walk with purpose and significance that can lead to personal transformation. The ‘holy place’ might not be a physical place but spiritual connection.

James said: “Pilgrimage has been a wonderful feature in my own life. As well as the simple joy of adventuring amidst the natural world, pilgrimage is profoundly spiritual and speaks into the everyday life of faith and discipleship.”

A pilgrim must learn to sift through their possessions and only carry what is necessary so they are not burdened on their journey. Similarly, a light emotional load makes a person feel fully present in their journey – popularly known as mindfulness in society today.

James said: “The simplicity of each day creates space to pay attention, noticing the beauty of the surroundings and in every moment. Meanwhile, fellow travellers become a gift for mutual sharing and generosity.”

Walking long distances daily is also a significant test of physical, mental and spiritual perseverance – and this inevitably prompts the pilgrim to consider the source of their security and dependence.

For James, the source of his comfort is Jesus who said: “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”: ref

Taize chance

■ Young people aged 18-29 are invited to join a group, with Bishop Graham, travelling from Norwich to France on July 15-24, for a unique experience of community, worship and prayer with Taizé. Thanks to the generous support of the Anne French Trust, the trip is offered at a discounted price of £100 per person, and bursaries are also available. For more information contact Jeremy Brown at taize.pilgrimage@dioceseofnorwich.org before the end of April 2023.

(Matthew 11.28-29).

The launch of the Pilgrims ministry is set for Saturday May 27. The day will begin with a simple Morning Prayer service at All Hallows’ convent in Ditchingham, followed by a day-long walk to Great Moulton church. Here the day will conclude with a short service of blessing and thanksgiving, led by the Bishop of Norwich – and author of ‘The Way Under Our Feet’ – Rt Rev Graham Usher.

There will be a pilgrim walk on the last Saturday of the month and a gathering at the convent chapel on the first Wednesday evening of the month. In both settings, companions will be invited to explore the spirituality of pilgrimage and the monastic life of prayer, considering how these approaches to the Christian journey might inform life as a follower of Jesus today.

Further information about Pilgrims is available at earshambenefice.org.uk/pilgrims, where you can sign up to receive regular email updates. To learn more email revjdshelton@outlook.com.

Encounter helped Ria to end abuse and self-harm

After suffering abuse as a young teenager, **Ria Fergusson** experienced an incredible healing encounter at a Christian camp, and now supports young people as a youth leader at Soul Church in Norwich. **Helen Baldry reports.**



Norwich church youth leader Ria Fergusson.

Ria had a loving upbringing within a Christian family and a supportive church in Suffolk. She describes herself as a ‘classic church kid’. Life was not without its challenges; Ria’s parents divorced when she was eight, and belonging to a church family helped her navigate this difficult time.

Between the age of ten and 13, Ria became immersed in online grooming by a child exploitation ring. During the grooming process she was exposed to a lot of unhealthy, impure, mature things at a young age, which led her to an addiction of self-harming along with horrifically negative thoughts about herself.

Ria’s story shows that a Christian upbringing and commitment at a young age does not protect a person from problems. She said: “I had grown up in church. I was around the things of God and was on fire for Jesus. It doesn’t make you any less of a Christian when you are going through hard things.”

The abuse left Ria feeling emotionally overwhelmed and she started self-harming in order to reduce this pain. She said: “My self-confidence and worth in myself and how I thought I should be treated was

completely warped.”

A turning point for Ria was at the age of 15 when she had an incredible life-changing encounter at a Christian summer camp when she experienced an amazing revelation of God’s love.

Ria said: “I came to that camp not expecting much. I walked into that camp hurt in my heart and on my body in physical ways.” One evening there was a talk about self-harm and those who struggled with this issue were invited to come forward for prayer. Ria responded and a youth leader prophesied over her saying that God would cut away the trauma and set her free from it.

Ria explained what happened next: “The weirdest thing happened. I felt this tingling sensation along my stomach and thighs where these self-harm scars were. They were prominent, they stung because they were quite recent.”

She said: “Later that evening, when I was alone, I took a look at my stomach and my thighs there were no scars left on my body. There was no evidence that I’d hurt myself in such a horrific way.”

Ria felt God speak to her softly: ‘Ria I took those scars all those years ago when I

died on the cross for you. That’s not something I want you to carry anymore’. Since that day, Ria has never harmed her body again and her levels of self-confidence are rising every day.

Ria’s unique understanding of self-harm, shame and the associated effects of anxiety and depression place her in a position to help others. Alongside her studies at UEA in English Literature, she is a youth leader at Soul Church in Norwich and believes that consistency and building trust is important when working with young people. She said: “God’s heart is for us to be a community and share our burdens with each other. We want every youth to walk out of the building knowing they are loved by Jesus.”

Ria speaks to young people, some of whom have gone through the same things she did. She said: “We don’t know what a young person’s life is like. Showing them that they are not alone is important. It’s brilliant for them to have other adults they can trust in their life.”

Ria gives thanks to God for pulling her out of a dark situation and giving her opportunities to share her personal story of faith.

Nurse’s mission to help Mexico refugees

■ Continued from front page

Australia, Thailand, Malaysia. “It was glorious,” she said. But after a year under water, she remembered that she enjoyed nursing, and got a job with an agency in Auckland.

The void was still there. “If I can’t save myself, I’ll save the world,” she thought. There was civil unrest going on in the Solomon Islands and she volunteered at the army hospital.

Soon she was spotted by World Vision, who invited her onto staff. At the time she had no idea that it was a Christian organisation. On the first morning the country programme manager invited the team to begin the week with prayer. “You’ve got to be kidding me,” she thought.

It got her talking to God again. Back in Auckland, she accepted an invitation from a flatmate to go to church. “At the altar call, my hand went in the air,” she said. “No-one was more shocked than me, but that was the moment when everything changed.”

It opened an intense time of healing, and the void began to fill. Two years later she was on a mission trip to Rwanda, and then joined a Bible school in Pemba, Mozambique with Iris Ministries. She would spend four years in Mozambique, finding her niche as a nursing missionary in the bush.

Once caught, the missionary bug would not respond to antibiotics. 2012 found her in the Peruvian jungle, teaching hygiene and sanitation to the remote Urarina tribe. Then back to England for a stint at Monkton Combe Christian school, imparting inspiration to missionary kids.

In August 2022 came the opportunity to attend a missionary conference in Holland. Josh and Olivia Muse from Kaleo International were there, who were evangelising in Reynosa. They prayed with Bridget, and as they finished, she said, “I’m coming.”

She will be nursing at a centre for people trying to enter the United States: Haitians fleeing the violence in their country, alongside Central and South Americans. The neighbourhood is dangerous, but the cartels have come to respect the humanitarian work of Kaleo and give them a call if there is trouble brewing.

Bridget began her mission on Tuesday February 22, supported by St Stephen’s Church and friends. If you would like to join them, you can contact her on bridgetcarroll@gmail.com

“The Holy Spirit is very much at work,” she said. “If you partner with Him, you’d be amazed at what He wants to do.”



Lent is about taking time to listen to God

Local government officer James Knight urges us to take time to listen to God during Lent, and see what abundant blessings He has in store.



say to us, because we can be sure that God wants to bestow more blessings in our lives than even our own heart's desire. I love St Paul's promise in Ephesians 3:20 that in Christ we are "able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think." It's one thing to be promised that we can do more than we will ask to do, because often we don't speak up for ourselves enough in supplication to God. But to be told we are able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we can even think - well, if you consider that, it's absolutely mind-blowing. It means that even if we were to spend hours, weeks, even years contemplating the very highest abundance we can imagine, it still wouldn't be exhaustive enough to capture what Christ can do inside us on our journey with Him if we let Him. It's so good, we can't even comprehend it. That's why having daily quiet time and inviting God to speak to us is so important - He can, and will, impart abundant growth, wisdom and clarity to us that we don't have the capacity to capture by ourselves. What a wonderful thought that is to contemplate at this time of year; that with the Holy Spirit living inside us, we are being promised gifts and treasures that we cannot possibly think and comprehend without Christ's input.

■ Lent is the period during which we make personal sacrifices to give regard to and praise for the astounding sacrifice Christ made for us on the cross. Our most precious resource in life is time, and I have found that spending our time in quietness, listening to God, is the most valuable thing we can give up for Him, because it is also the most internally beneficial part of the day for us too. Taking time each day to sit silently in praise, and hear what God wants to say to us, is essential in enabling us to be focused enough to 'Seek first the Kingdom of God'. We can only properly seek if we devote time to listen to what God wants to



New Matthew Project Interim CEO, Rachel Chapman.

Charity names interim chief

The Norwich-based Christian charity offers a range of services to people affected by substance misuse and mental health issues, as well as supporting their families. Rachel steps into the new role already knowing the charity well. She has been deputy CEO for the past two years and has headed up the charity's On Track programme for young people who are not in education, employment, or training. Rachel's background before joining the Matthew Project was in education, most recently as Project Manager at City College Norwich, and for many years she has been committed to working with some of the most disadvantaged young people in Norfolk. Rachel is looking forward to this challenging new role and leading the Matthew Project as it approaches its 40th birthday in 2024. She said: "I am really lucky to work alongside a committed, passionate, and experienced team of staff and volunteers. Across the

The Matthew Project has announced the appointment of Rachel Chapman as Interim CEO of the charity following the recent departure of Andy Sexton. Eldred Willey reports.

the lives of many, providing support as they seek to rebuild their lives. "We are primarily a Norfolk-based charity, but recently we have expanded with the provision of support for veterans across East Anglia, including our latest outreach into Cambridgeshire," said Rachel. "With the rise of mental health issues during the pandemic we have grown our services for young people, providing more support and counselling for mental health issues. In the last year, we have seen a marked increase in the number of young people across Norfolk affected by other people's substance use. Finally, we seek to help young people who are not in employment or education, supporting them to re-engage with employment and training opportunities. "With ever increasing demand for our support, I am thrilled to continue the leadership of this amazing charity doing such important work, into our 40th year and beyond," she said. matthewproject.org

Couple help to celebrate 650th Julian of Norwich anniversary

Josiah and Jo Lee English are offering a warm, flavoursome and ecological welcome to visitors exploring the writings of Norwich's most renowned mystic on the 650th anniversary of her famous book. Eldred Willey reports.

People from across the world will be drawn to Norwich this year," says Josiah English, Resident Steward at All Hallows Guest House, which is next to the Julian Shrine. "They will share in celebrating and learning from a woman of the fourteenth century about whom we know next to nothing. Why? Because her Revelations of Divine Love, the first known book written by a woman in English, has become a spiritual classic known and loved by millions and a guide to many in the way of faith, hope and love." This year, Norwich celebrates the 650th anniversary of the remarkable 'Showings' of Lady Julian, 16 revelations of the love of God given to her in May of 1373. Tucked away down an alley off King Street sits one of Norwich's smallest but most historically important churches: St Julian's, containing the cell and former home of Julian of Norwich.

From the outside, St Julian's is rather unassuming: bombed during WWII, the squat round tower on the west end was never rebuilt to its former height, and surrounded as it is by post-war redevelopment, the church is almost invisible until you are standing in front of it. But on closer inspection, the Shrine site contains treasures far beyond its humble exterior. Inside the church lies the heart of the campus: the Julian cell, a place of peace for visitors of all faiths and none, within whose walls countless people have sat and prayed, pondering what life must have been like for Lady Julian, entombed within the small room for decades, living a life of self-imposed lockdown with only minimal interaction with the outside world, committing herself wholly to a life of prayer and service to God. Beyond the cell is the churchyard, hidden by a brick wall like a secret garden, a green oasis in what is otherwise a heavily built-up area, providing sanctuary to locals and visitors alike. In spring and summer, a Saturday community garden project brings together enthusiastic volunteers for 'green therapy', with the aims of building community and improving the garden for all comers. Adjoining the garden is the Julian



Josiah and Jo Lee English outside St Julian's Church in Norwich.

Centre and All Hallows Guesthouse, both equally unassuming buildings clad as they are in mid-century beige brick, both awaiting updated signage. Following a major renovation project over the last two years, however, both the Centre and the Guesthouse have been given a new lease of life and are now formally incorporated into the Julian Shrine as integral members, under the supervision of the newly formed Julian of Norwich Partnership. Most visible from Rouen Rd, just downhill from the NHS walk-in centre, All Hallows House - a former convent - has



reopened as the Shrine guesthouse, offering simple but comfortable accommodation

to Julian pilgrims and Norwich visitors alike. "Central to the Julian Shrine's ministry of hospitality," said Josiah, "All Hallows offers more than just bed and breakfast; as well as eight comfortable bedrooms, there is a state-of-the-art kitchen available to guests for self-catering; a stunning sitting room with log fire and welcoming atmosphere; access to the Julian of Norwich Reference Library with space to study; and a beautiful House Chapel, used for services in the week and reserved for quiet reflection. Beyond the house there is a kitchen garden, and private access to the churchyard, both of which attract a wide variety of birds and wildlife." Behind the scenes of this renewed venture are the inhabitants of All Hallows: Josiah and Jo Lee English, who arrived in Norwich from Birmingham in 2022 when Josiah was appointed Resident Steward at All Hallows. Josiah and Jo Lee have firmly put their stamp on All Hallows, bringing an emphasis on care for the environment and ethical responsibilities to all they do, whether in the choices made for house furnishings, careful sourcing of breakfast ingredients, or eco-friendly cleaning and laundry products. This young couple ("though not as young as they look!" comments Josiah) have a heart for hospitality and community and can often be found on winter evenings sharing stories with guests around the fire or stopping for a cup of tea to listen or chat. Of course, they aren't alone at All Hallows Guesthouse: they share the space with Eilonwy, the Pembrokeshire Corgi puppy who steals the hearts of friends and strangers alike. The guesthouse, billed as a unique urban retreat, aims to offer a place of peace and escape to visitors, despite its location near the centre of the thriving city of Norwich. "If you have never been to the Julian Shrine," Josiah said, "this is the year to come: to celebrate 650 years of Julian's Revelations there is a full calendar of events in which to participate, and for anyone interested we would love to host you at All Hallows, so do get in touch." More information can be found at allhallowsnorwich.co.uk, or by emailing contactus@allhallowsnorwich.co.uk

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Abbey offers warm space and free lunch

Wymondham Abbey is offering a Warm Space during the week alongside a free lunch and a weekly playgroup after 'giving the idea a go'.

■ Father Christopher Davies, Interim Priest in Charge, said the idea of offering the Abbey as a "Warm Space" during the week came from a member of the congregation. She researched what was already being offered locally and the church liaised with other local churches of all denominations to make sure there wasn't any duplication.

"The idea of a simple soup lunch, free of charge, where people are encouraged to stay, read magazines and try their hand at jigsaws, was then agreed upon. Some very worthwhile pastoral contacts soon followed," said Fr Christopher. "The local council gave the PCC £2,000 towards heating costs and this has been a huge support.

"Alongside this, a young mother offered to set up a small playgroup each week. We visited the excellent playgroup run by All Saints Mattishall who provided really helpful advice and a local charity provided funds for toys and equipment. This group has developed beyond all expectation and now regularly attracts up to 50 babies and toddlers with their carers."

Some good pastoral contacts have followed with several enquiries about baptism and a wedding! Community midwives are now making use of the warm space as well for post-natal groups.

"Our experience has been really positive and we would encourage any other churches to 'have a go' and see where the Holy Spirit leads," said Fr Christopher.

If you would like to talk to about setting up something similar, Fr Christopher would be happy to have a discussion. You can email him at canon@wymondhamabbey.org.uk or call 01953 605671.



New Dean of Norwich wants outward-focused Cathedral

The Very Rev Canon Dr Andrew Braddock was installed as the fortieth Dean of Norwich a few weeks ago and, speaking exclusively to Good News, he said he wants an outward focused Cathedral community. Keith Morris reports.

It was a welcome return to Norwich Cathedral for the Dean who was actually ordained there 25 years ago in 1998 and spent his first ten years of public ministry in the Diocese of Norwich.

The new Dean, who was previously the Interim Dean of Gloucester, officially began his new role at the helm of Norwich Cathedral during a special Institution and Installation Service on Saturday January 28.

"The Cathedral is a place of welcome and hospitality so that all those who come can discover something of the mystery and the beauty and love of God in Jesus Christ. This is complemented by us looking outwards, working in partnership with other churches and other community groups and other faiths and so on to make a difference and work for the common good," said the Dean.

"It really is putting into practice Jesus' command to love God and love your neighbour as yourself and what does that look like in Norwich at the start of the 21st century.

"I am very touched by the wonderfully warm welcome I and my family have received from so many people across the life of the Cathedral, city, county and diocese. I look forward to developing Norwich Cathedral's rich tradition of being a place of worship, welcome and learning open to all. It provides both common space and holy ground from which to serve our communities as we seek to love God and love our neighbours as ourselves," he said.

"I am looking forward to learning about all the partnerships and networking that are already happening and to making those relationships for myself with other local community and faith and church leaders and discovering together what is God calling us to do and be in times such as these.

"We know about the cost of living crisis, the climate crisis and all those challenges our communities are facing, so how together as God's children is God calling us to love and serve the communities in which we are set. I am really looking to work with others to see how we can play our part as part of that building on what the cathedral is already doing."

In his previous role in Gloucester, the Dean put his words into practice.

"I was personally involved in being a trustee for a Christian counselling service, Listening Post, for those who could not otherwise afford it, making a real difference



The Very Rev Canon Dr Andrew Braddock and his wife Victoria outside Norwich Cathedral. Picture by Bill Smith.

in people's lives.

"I was also involved with the local credit unions – dealing with financial exclusion and most recently, last year, I was asked to chair the city centre commission in Gloucester, working with a whole range of different stakeholders and partners to help come to a common vision as to what the city of Gloucester aspires to be in the future.

"I have a personal commitment to working with others and I look forward to see what opportunities there will be in Norwich.

"I know that there is already a lot going one and it is important to come and to listen and to learn and to discern what might be the new things as well as those to continue to be involved with and to encourage the team here to continue to develop."

So what does the Dean think about bringing dinosaurs and helter-skelter rides into the Cathedral?

"What I love about Norwich Cathedral is

that it is not afraid to try something different," he said. "It recognises that many thousands of worshippers and visitors and pilgrims come here every year, but there are still many people in the city and county that have not come in, to discover that it is their cathedral as well. Absolutely the right spirit.

"Why be afraid to try something different, never for the sake of novelty but because we want people to come here to encounter something of the love and the beauty and the presence of God because, at the end of the day, this is a place of worship and prayer that speaks of God's love in Christ," he said.

"There may be different ways to get people to engage with us and going out to engage with others but it comes back to that call to love God and to love our neighbours as ourselves and enable people to follow the way of Christ."

cathedral.org.uk



Mary Magdalene and Jesus in last year's Norwich Passion Play.

Enjoy new video of Norwich Passion Play

The team behind last year's Norwich Passion Play have produced a set of resources to enable churches, schools and youth groups to use a free 13-minute video of the play in the run-up to this Easter.

■ Last Easter, thousands of people enjoyed an engaging and wide-ranging Passion Play on the streets of Norwich city centre.

"There was Mary Magdalene jumping up and down on a plinth on Hay Hill in Norwich – drawing an expectant crowd, Jesus riding on a bike up to Millennium Plain where he confronted the authorities and he shared a fish and chip last supper with his disciples," said Keith Morris, chair of Celebrate Norfolk, which organised the play with Saltmine Theatre company and many local churches.

"We saw the agonies of the Garden of Gethsemane and Jesus' dramatic trial in front

of the Forum and his crucifixion and death outside St Peter Mancroft Church. And the final joyous scenes inside the church where the disbelieving disciples saw Jesus come back from the dead in an amazing finale."

This Easter, the Celebrate Norfolk team have released a specially produced and edited 13-minute video which captures all the key moments of the performance.

Keith said: "The video contains helpful subtitles and a personal message from Freddy Goymier, who played the part of Jesus. It is an ideal resource to show at a church small groups or youth group, maybe even in a church service or school assembly.

"We have produced short resource sheets which explain the background to the play and suggest some questions to get people thinking and discuss in small groups or with your family and friends."

The video is freely available on YouTube at www.youtube.com/@celebratenorfolk and the resource sheets can be downloaded from www.celebratenorfolk.co.uk

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Centres offer a warm welcome for activities, retreats, holidays

Christian conference, activity, holiday and retreat centres across Norfolk and North Suffolk are welcoming guests who are looking for something a little different.

The Horstead Centre activity centre, near Coltishall, is a well-established residential outdoor activity centre and retreat, with a strong affiliation to the Diocese of Norwich.

Centre manager Will Mills said: "Our charitable mission is to "provide children and young people with the best possible opportunities for educational, personal, social, and spiritual development, through an exciting programme of residential stays or activity days."

"2022 was a thoroughly enjoyable year at the Centre; our first full season back since Covid. The team have been both thankful and excited to experience a strong revitalisation of demand for the experiences we offer. It's fantastic to hear the Centre full of laughter and energy again.

"Despite this, the impact of Covid, and other social, environmental and economic factors, on children and young people's well-being is a longer-term concern. We feel that high-quality residential stays and outdoor experiences are now (even more than ever) perfect opportunities for supporting the recovery of emotional resilience and spirituality and for the development of confidence and interpersonal skills.

"The Horstead Centre is an ideal venue for youth groups, church retreats and school visits. In 2023 we're keen to work with more teenage groups than ever before, and to explore partnerships which can help us to support young people's physical and mental wellbeing."

www.horsteadcentre.org.uk

Ringsfield Hall provides children and young people with outdoor residential opportunities for church youth group and school trips. Activities relate to nature, care for the planet and very special care and respect for the physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of each child.

Ringsfield Hall offers both residential stays and activity days to schools and church groups particularly.

The 14 acres of grounds include a games field with football posts, a badminton court, two fire pits with canopies, woodland areas, meadow, garden, pasture with animals and wild areas for exploration, discovery and fun.

Centre director David Townend said: "As a Christian centre our core aim is to create a holistic, welcoming space to encourage the reconnection of both children and adults, to themselves, to one another, to the earth and to the spiritual within, that is to foster the spirit of the child.

"To do this we offer our lovely hall, magical grounds, the freedom to explore

discover, create and 'be', and our particular ethos which aims to offer respect, empathy, acceptance and unconditional positive regard. We also offer our commitment to enable children to experience the natural world, to learn about it and to learn to love and care for it and all its life."

For enquiries contact bookings@ringsfield-hall.co.uk or tel 01502 713020.

Ringsfield Hall, Hall Road, Beccles, Suffolk NR34 8JR

Learn more at www.ringsfield-hall.co.uk

All Hallows Guesthouse in Norwich offers a unique urban retreat experience in the heart of the city. Now part of the Julian of Norwich Shrine, this former convent contains eight beautifully refurbished bedrooms including four garden-view rooms which overlook St Julian's Church, the Julian of Norwich Cell, and the secret churchyard garden.

Guests have access to a wide range of common areas, including a private chapel, the Julian of Norwich Reference Library and study space, a cosy sitting room with an open fire, and a brand new state-of-the-art



self-catering kitchen.

Resident steward, Josiah English, said: "We are located only a short walk from Norwich train station, and only ten minutes' walk from the cathedral and outdoor market, it is an ideal place to explore the city while still able to offer a peaceful retreat experience. All guests are welcome to join in with the rhythm of prayer of the house, either at services in our own chapel or next door at one of St Julian's daily services. All bookings come with free continental breakfast, which focus on homemade, local and organic ingredients.

"You are warmly invited to visit us at All Hallows, this year of all years as we celebrate 650 years of Julian of Norwich's Revelations of Divine Love."

Rooms from £40; discounts for midweek and longer stays.

www.allhallowsnorwich.co.uk

Quiet Waters is a Norfolk/Suffolk Christian retreat house providing a friendly guest house experience for tired and weary Christians seeking a time of spiritual refreshment, those seeking God's direction or those simply wanting to spend time in His presence.

Quiet Waters is a large Georgian house offering comfortable accommodation for up to 14 guests in 8 bedrooms with two spacious living rooms, dining room (serving delicious home-cooked meals) and its very own Chapel.

www.quietwaters.org.uk

Christian Conference Centre Letton Hall, located near Shipdam in mid-Norfolk, is fully open to groups, churches and families, who have been enjoying the venue ever since Peter Carroll bought the Grade II listed building in 1979 to become a retreat centre.

The Norfolk Wing of the centre has also been refurbished and is available to hire out separately as an Airbnb. When larger groups are in, it is used as an overflow from

the main building.

The centre has 73 beds in the main house, and nine in the Norfolk Wing. Apart from a couple of large family rooms, most rooms are one or two bed. The nearby Stables has 54 beds, including two ten-bed dormitories and several three- or four-bed rooms.

You can find out more about Letton Hall on their website www.lettonhall.org

The Pleasaunce Christian Endeavour Holiday Centre on the North Norfolk coast near Cromer provides quality accommodation and programmes including a range of activities, evening entertainment and times of prayer and worship.

The Pleasaunce is a unique, Grade Two* listed mansion standing in six acres of grounds which can accommodate up to 80 visitors, making it perfect for large parties. Guests can relax in the tranquil rose or sunken gardens and enjoy the cloisters and clock tower.

www.cehc.org.uk

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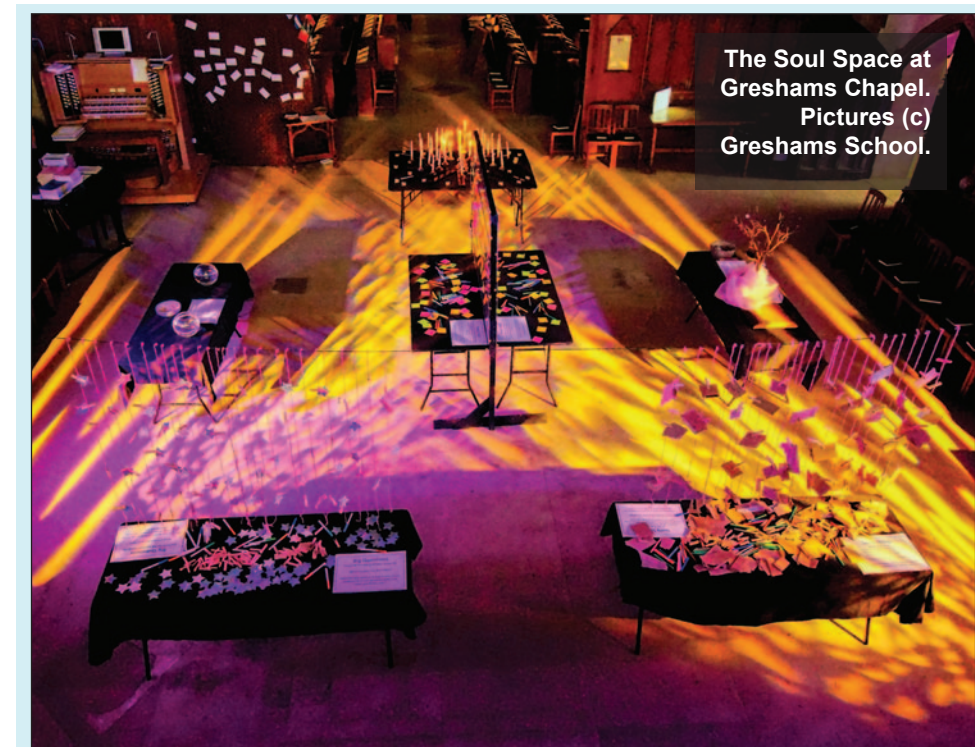
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For more information contact: **William Mills, 01603 737215**, william.mills@horsteadcentre.org.uk or visit: www.horsteadcentre.org.uk
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Follow our adventures on:



The Soul Space at Greshams Chapel. Pictures (c) Greshams School.

Space for interactive prayer at Holt school

Students at Gresham's School in North Norfolk have been exploring spirituality, prayer, and life's biggest questions with their very own interactive 'soul space' in the school chapel.

Back for a third year, the interactive Prayer Space in school has become a popular part of the calendar with staff and students alike, and took place this year from February 5 to 19.

The historic interior of Gresham's Chapel was transformed with stunning and immersive light and sound. The space was also filled with creative, tactile prayer 'stations' which gave the students an opportunity to develop skills of personal reflection and spirituality in a fun and creative way.

In addition to regular service and lesson time, the Prayer Space was also open to all staff and students every evening, providing an important space for stillness, quiet and reflection in the busy day of a boarding school student's life. The initiative has proved to be very popular with hundreds of students choosing to take part.

One year 9 student said: "Soul Space is incredible. I've never seen anything like it."

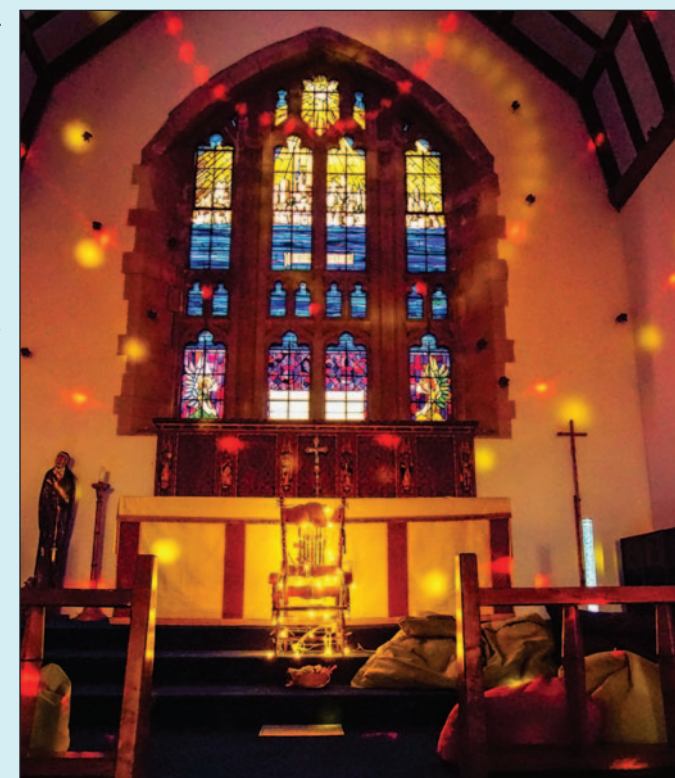
A year 11 student commented: "I was so pleased to see that Soul Space is back. It is one of the highlights of life at school."

A Sixth Form student said: "I loved it. I can't

explain the way it made me feel but it was an amazing feeling. I left Chapel feeling like a new person."

School Chaplain, Rev Jack Branford, said: "It has been another very successful week. Chapel is at the heart of school life here, but there is no doubt that this is the Chapel highlight of the year for many of our students. The positive feedback we get from staff and students is really quite overwhelming. Young people have an innate sense of spirituality and I love the way Prayer Spaces in Schools provides a safe and inclusive place for this to flourish.

This is the third year of 'Soul Space' at Gresham's, and my sixth year facilitating Prayer Spaces in Norfolk schools. I would strongly encourage others to give it a go. There are lots of resources and help locally which you can draw upon and you could make a huge difference to young lives."



Matthew finds new ways to serve his community

Rev Matthew Price feels that there are four key lessons he has learned from his experience at St Mary Magdalene. He identified these as:

Finding ways to serve the wider community, without pressure or expectation of any return

■ The church has been experimenting with ways of serving the community with very limited resources, putting on events and clubs that meet the needs in the wider parish, making best use of the gifts, skills and time of church members.

He gave a simple example of their annual community pancake party: an after-school drop-in, with the promise of free pancakes, tea and coffee and an opportunity to play games such as tossing pancakes as high as possible inside the church building! Gradually the event has been building and this year over 200 pancakes were consumed.

Nurturing Biblical faith and discipleship, one by one

■ The team at St Mary Magdalene make a point of respecting each person that comes through their door for their individuality and supporting them with whatever they bring with them, whether a disability, language barrier, social anxiety, financial hardship, or differences in educational needs, sexual preferences, gender identity etc.

Matthew says: "Each person is looking for that personal touch, that friendly exchange, that conversation, care and respect. Each person is made in the image of God and loved to death by Jesus; each person needs to know the deep joy and hope of knowing Christ as their Lord and Saviour. They need to be welcomed, honoured and

included in the community and set on a path of journeying into the Bible, walking with Christ and learning what it means to follow Him."

Having faith that funding follows bold loving service

■ Matthew explains: "Having little money at the outset, we learned how to be creative, to use waste well and to share generously of ourselves. We worked hard as a team, believing that in reaching out to people, in a way that meets their needs, the Lord would assist us.

"We have found repeatedly that, as we have set out a vision, shared it and acted on it, funds have been forthcoming, sometimes beforehand and sometimes afterwards, covering all the costs. We now find that the wider community often donate money, trusting our church that we will be using it well to give back to the community."

Working with partners outside of the local church

■ Matthew points out that we often fall into the trap of thinking that all the resources for mission need to be found within the local church itself, whereas experience has taught him that we actually benefit by being humble and dependent on the wider church and particularly the wider community to support the work.

He said: "We continue to ask for help, especially through social media, for volunteers and for funding. But I have constantly been amazed at the level of interest and support there is when you step out in faith and service of your community.

Sharing the vision, sharing the good news stories and asking for help outside of the church has led to many really fruitful partnerships which have blessed us immeasurably as we have sought to be a blessing to the community."



Rev Matthew Price outside St Mary Magdalene Church in Gorleston.

The hard lessons of urban mission

Rev Matthew Price, is vicar of the thriving St Mary Magdalene Church in Gorleston, and in October 2020 he was awarded a British Empire Medal (BEM) for services to the community during the pandemic, in the Queen's Birthday Honours list. Tony Rothe reports.

The Gorleston church has been committed to growing and developing their community-based mission since Matthew arrived five years ago, and last summer he was asked by the Bishop of Norwich to take on the additional role of Bishop's Advisor for Urban and Estates Mission.

Matthew said: "The Biblical priority of mission amongst the poorest has historically been somewhat overlooked in the national strategy of the church so it is wonderful that in the recent Diocese of Norwich Vision, urban mission has been identified as a key priority. I am now eager to support the working out of that in practice."

Matthew's role is to act as an advocate for urban and estates mission within the Diocese of Norwich and the wider Church of England. So far this has included a regular programme of online networking events to foster relationships across the Diocese and

also connect to the wider networks and resources of the Church of England and the wider church in the area.

He also instigated an annual day conference where those leading mission in these urban areas can gather, share and learn about the opportunities and how to overcome barriers. The speaker at last year's event was the chair of the Church of England Estates Evangelism Task Group, Bishop Lynn Cullens.

Matthew is also available to be consulted by individual clergy and lay leaders seeking to build their congregations in more deprived locations. He explains: "Urban and estates ministry can be lonely and bewildering and so with a team of others, we are building up networks that seek to give companionship, conversation and training on the journey. I have been able to share some of the lessons we have learnt at St Mary Magdalene which has seen church growth from 20 to 90 people in the last five years."

New Bishop of East Anglia is finding his feet

The Catholic Diocese of East Anglia welcomed its fifth bishop just before Christmas when **Canon Peter Collins** from Cardiff was ordained at St John's Cathedral in Norwich, before a congregation of up to 1,100 people including Cardinal Vincent Nichols and over 20 bishops. Keith Morris reports.

In his homily Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the Archbishop of Westminster and leader of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, directly addressed Bishop-Elect Peter: "In a few moments, all of us gathered here on this splendid occasion will act as witnesses as you solemnly promise to undertake the duties of a bishop until the end of your life.

"These promises, one by one, detail the tasks that lie ahead of you – preaching the Gospel, teaching the truth, sustaining the unity of the Church, serving others in charity and compassion, reaching out to those on the margins, and practising constant prayer. All fulfilled, as you will promise, so as to afford no grounds for reproach. Peter, this is not an easy task."

In his first public words as Bishop of East Anglia, the Rt Rev Peter Collins addressed the assembly saying: "To all of you – those here present in the cathedral and those joining through the live-stream – my brothers and sisters, from near and far; those of you who have known me for many years and those who are getting over the shock of meeting me for the first time. In allegiance to Christ, I offer a loving embrace, an assurance of my prayers and a commitment to service.

"Whilst depending upon God's grace and mercy, it was nonetheless with a little trepidation that this Celt journeyed eastward to this gloriously fertile, though flat, land of Angles and Saxons. I rejoice that our British family has always been a wonderful international mix, no more so than in this present age. I draw encouragement from the warmth of your welcome and great strength from the multitude of messages offering an assurance of prayers for my episcopal ministry in this beloved part of England."

Bishop Peter was born in 1958, in south-east Wales, the youngest of four children, and grew up in a thriving Catholic community where buses brought worshippers to Mass from the outlying villages.

He went to secondary school in Merthyr Tydfil, and after responding to the call to priesthood in 1978, was sent to seminary in Valladolid, in Spain.

In 1984 he was ordained a priest in the Archdiocese of Cardiff and appointed to the Metropolitan Cathedral of St David's in the capital.

After a second curacy at St Mary's, Bridgend, he was surprised to be called back to Valladolid, this time to be vice-rector. The post brought with it further study – first a degree in Madrid and then licentiate studies at the University of Salamanca.

Returning to the UK, he was appointed



Bishop Peter Collins at his ordination. Picture by Bill Smith.

parish priest of Chepstow and in 1995 attended the first national conference on safeguarding at Ushaw. It was a providential piece of learning, as a major safeguarding case concerning his predecessor was about to come to light in his own parish. "Safeguarding has been a significant part of my ministry since that point," he said.

In 2001 he became Dean of the Metropolitan Cathedral in Cardiff – a post he held for 18 years.

Last October came the call from the Apostolic Nunciature saying that the Pope wished him to become Bishop of East Anglia and his ordination followed in mid December.

Still finding his feet in such a large, and unknown to him, diocese, Bishop Peter recently told Radio Maria England (based within the diocese in Cambridge): "I am enjoying East Anglia no end. It is so beautiful and it's all an adventure for me every time I go out in the car – it's all new.

"I am so looking forward to visiting all the parishes in East Anglia and the entire diocesan family over the coming months. It's a delight to be in this wondrous diocese."

Bishop Peter is based at the White House in Poringland, along with the small Curia team who help him run the diocese.

Bishop Peter's chosen episcopal motto is 'Credite in lucem' (Believe in the Light): "In John's Gospel we are told: 'Believe in the light and you will become children of the light.' Our own baptismal candles drew their light from the Paschal Candle, symbolising the Risen Christ. As we prepare for the challenges of the coming year, let us be refreshed in the full glory of faith, inspired through the wide vision of hope and empowered by the endurance of charity," said Bishop Peter.

Third Norfolk house for the homeless

■ Bishop Peter Collins has formally opened and blessed the St Vincent de Paul (SVP) Society's third house for the homeless in North Norfolk, an event celebrated by conference members and clergy from local Christian communities.

With the opening of Amélie House in Cromer, the North Norfolk SVP Conference has completed its second expansion project for homeless families and individuals, with two properties in Cromer and one in Sheringham.

The Temporary Emergency Accommodation House is now operational for a further two homeless families. The whole project now protects up to four families and six single individuals at any one time. Since December 2019 the Project has protected 100 lives from homelessness, including 52 children, who have moved on to permanent new homes.

The North Norfolk Conference has been supporting street homeless people in need of emergency accommodation since 2012. In December 2019 the SVP Society purchased its first permanent house in the area. St Vincent's House became operational providing a safe home for two large families. A second unit, Blessed Rosalie Rendu House, was opened in February of last year; supporting up to six single homeless individuals.

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Pictured is Fr Michael Stack.
Picture by Con McHugh.

Hospital chaplain hails power in praying for sick

Fr Michael Stack spent more than five weeks in critical care at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in King's Lynn in 2020, due to Covid-19.

He "died" twice and was on a ventilator for three 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 and is now National Chaplain to the Association of Catholic Nurses of England & Wales (ACNEW). He knows the vital role chaplains can play for many patients and about the healing power of prayerful companionship with the sick and dying. He feels the experience has only strengthened his faith.

Within a short time of arriving in Norfolk for a holiday from Coventry, Fr Michael had developed a bad cough and started hallucinating. He was admitted by

A Norfolk Catholic hospital chaplain, who two years ago survived his own three-month hospital battle with Covid-19, has written a new book about the power of praying with and for the sick. **Keith Morris** reports.

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."

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

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.

Fr Gordon Adam, Assistant Priest at King's Lynn Catholic Parish, saw Fr

Michael at least twice and 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 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."

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.

"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.

So what did Fr Michael, now living in Thetford, learn from his own close encounter with death in hospital? "I have become aware again that we rely on others. It is the prayers offered, the support given to my family. It is the nurses and doctors in our NHS who by their care save lives – many lives. My gratitude is to the many life-savers and nursing staff who used their gifts to help me. Thank you."

www.catholicnurses.org.uk

Fr Michael's book details his hospital experiences

Fr Michael recalls a dozen of his own experiences as a hospital chaplain in his new short booklet **Reflections by a Retired Hospital Chaplain**.

■ Among the episodes are a family throwing an 80th birthday party for dementia-sufferer Nina. The almost constant blank stare on her face lifted briefly when she tasted her favourite banana cake and a forgotten taste came back.

Teenager Zoe, suffered from Sickle Cell, which caused her great pain. "As we prayed together Zoe stopped crying and said thank you for listening to me. Listening to those who are sick is very important," said Fr Michael. "We can give some answers, but most times silence and simply being there helps."

Blind D-Day and Korea war veteran Tommy was also a double leg amputee. One day when Fr Michael went to visit, only one of Tommy's prosthetic legs was beside his bed – the other was missing. The nurses started a search and found it in the ward bathroom. Fr Michael regularly wheeled Tommy to the Chapel Mass on Sunday and would then describe the chapel, altar and stained glass windows.

Talking to Polish former world war two pilot Boleslaw, he told Fr Michael about his role in over 80 bombings missions. "I contributed to so many deaths," said Boleslaw. Fr Michael replied: "But you helped to bring the war to an end." With tears in his eyes, Fr Michael said the prayer of Absolution (forgiveness) over Boleslaw. Afterwards Boleslaw said he felt different for their time together.

Bernard Longley, Archbishop of Birmingham, writes: "I am grateful to Fr Michael for his thoughtful and welcome contribution to our reflections on the experience of the pandemic. The 12 episodes from his own extensive experience of ministering to the sick, including his own encounter with Covid-19, help us to realise how much we rely on the care of others at such moments when we are unable to look after ourselves and the importance of prayer."

Reflections by a Retired Hospital Chaplain is available from Fr Michael for £5 from michael.stack3@gmail.com or the bookshop at the Catholic national Shrine in Walsingham, all proceeds to ACNEW.



Healing of the Leper by Jesus at Christ the King, Coventry. Picture by Amanda Slater.

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