

A Phoenix from the Ashes

“I found myself thinking, ‘I’m having a bad dream, I’m going to wake up soon.’”

A year into his first headteacher’s post, John-Paul Draper felt he’d found his ideal job, at a 60-pupil Church primary school in pretty Powerstock, above Bridport.

In autumn half-term 2011, a phone call told him the beautiful Victorian building was an inferno. Fire crews were on site for 12 hours.

“At first it was devastating”, says John-Paul, “but even in those worst days, I kept finding little symbols of hope in the rubble that had somehow survived, signs that someone cared for us.”

In heaven?

He laughs, “Let’s just say it got me thinking more seriously about faith.

“People on earth cared for us too, rallying to help - nearby schools, the Education Authority, even the press. Local people were great, and let us use the Village Hall for nearly two years.

“Movingly, we had equipment donated from our partner school in Ghana. Their building was badly damaged by a storm recently, our kids raised money for them without teachers prompting.

“We’ve rebuilt, opened up space with today’s building techniques, and have the latest equipment. We couldn’t have done it without financial support from the Diocese or its expertise.

“The kids love having modern gizmos while being able to feel the old bricks and beams. And after two years of stress, it’s a joy to come to work here.”



Bishop's Letter

The Right Revd Nicholas Holtam
Bishop of Salisbury

There are many ways of telling the Christmas stories. The first group of youngsters I ever prepared for Confirmation weren't much good at reading, so the Bible was difficult for them.

Instead, we went to The National Gallery to look at two paintings of the Nativity. One was of shepherds and the baby Jesus with Mary and Joseph in a stable.

It was Luke's Gospel. The birth of Jesus was for ordinary people and the first to be told about it were not the good religious people of Bethlehem but shepherds from the hillside who went to worship.

The other painting was of Magi, wise men looking like Kings, with their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. This was Matthew's Gospel. The birth of Jesus was for all the nations. The child is King and God and his death will not be the last word.

The kids got it and saw how the Gospels each describe Jesus differently.

The stories of his birth are like the introduction to any good book that gives us the eyes and ears for what follows.

Some ways of telling the Christmas story are better than others. Commercial Christmas, with its 'Glory to God in the High Street', is limited.

So is the family Christmas that depends on parents spending lots on the children trying to create the perfect Christmas.

It never works. Christmas is to be celebrated but it can't be consumed.



Carol singers and school nativity plays, church services and community festivals, looking after those in need all tell the tale so it catches hold of us. Love came down at Christmas and the birth of Jesus renews our hopes for the peace of the whole world.

Over The Edge!

Gillingham's Rector, Peter Greenwood, was first over the edge when twenty intrepid abseilers descended from the tower of St Mary's Church.

Cheered on by a crowd of his congregation and townsfolk, Peter's downward journey was all about raising money for the work of Christian Aid.

Peter was joined by two other local clergy - Methodist Minister Paul Arnold, and Pete Bond from Gillingham Community Church. Later on, Graham Kings, Bishop of

Sherborne, also took the plunge.

The event raised over £3,000 for Christian Aid, the global relief and development agency of 40 UK churches. It supports people in low-income countries and works to change the systems that keep people poor.



Time Out At Pilsdon

In the beautiful West Dorset Hills in the late 1950s, a group gathered to develop a common life of prayer, hospitality and work, off the beaten track.

Decades later, the stunning views make the Pilsdon Community a great place for a retreat, particularly for those facing a major change in their lives.

The community also welcomes people in crisis, from all ages and backgrounds, providing a safe environment where people can begin to rebuild their lives.

There are up to seven full-time members of the community, but there are many opportunities to volunteer for cooking, gardening, care of livestock and building maintenance.

Learn more at www.pilsdon.org.uk.



Praying For Judgement



“Court is a hard place – judgements are made and there’s nowhere to hide.”

Andrew Wells is the volunteer lay chaplain to Salisbury Law Courts and a worshipper at the Cathedral. An Australian who lived in mainland Europe during a legal career with the UN and later private consultancy, he retired to the city in 2011 with his wife Sally, a priest.

“I started in March and still feel like the fishermen who Christ called to follow him onto dry land. When I encounter difficult situations, I pray, ‘Please Lord, stop me getting in your way’”.

Salisbury’s court complex hosts everything from serious Crown

criminal cases to benefits and pension tribunals. Family court hearings often see people endure deep emotional pain.

“My tasks here are to pray and simply to be present. I pray in different parts of the building to start the day. Then for the staff by name, and for all who will be present – lawyers, defendants, witnesses, victims and others.

“This is a stressful place, and people usually pass through briefly. If people want someone to talk to, I try to listen in a non-judgemental and practical way.

“Sometimes, these short meetings give me the chance to refer people on to others who can help them long term. Maybe the man about to be released with £45 and no home to go to, or the woman who finally confronts addiction after a conviction.

“It can be tough for the people who work here too. The details of some cases are disturbing to any sane person. Judges and lawyers, like everyone else, have their own problems at home which can leave them emotionally drained.”

Andrew would appreciate prayer support, and asks people who could join a prayer network to contact him on chaplain.slc@gmail.com

Church House, Crane Street, Salisbury, SP1 2QB
grapevine@salisbury.anglican.org