MARK'S MESSENGER

The Parish Magazine of
St Mark's Church, Broomhill and Broomhall, Sheffield

Autumn 2026



Photo by Siobhan Hoyes

Journeys of a Lifetime

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CAMINO CHALLENGE



Having spent 6 years prioritising caring for my mum in Somerset, returning to Sheffield following her death last year left me feeling I'd lost a sense of purpose despite being able to engage more fully in the life of St Mark's and being surrounded by family, friends, colleagues and congregation. My head was full of questions, including whether I was fulfilling my vocation. I was constantly busy, and yet there was always more to do. I sensed I needed to do something different, but what?

I decided I needed to stop doing the things I have always done, to pause and to create some space in which to listen and discern. I had a long held desire to walk the Camino de Santiago, and so it was in this context that I set about planning a journey of a lifetime.

Although I'd love to do it, I knew I was not fit enough to walk the full length of the most well known Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route in Spain going from St Jean Pied Du Port in the French side of the Pyrenees to Santiago De Compostela in Galicia a distance of 450 miles, so planning was based on getting my Compostela, obtained by walking the minimum distance of 100km (62 miles). The route would be from Sarria to Santiago, in May / June when the weather is most favourable and it's not too busy. I'd take 9 days to make each stage more manageable walking 6 -12 miles daily. I did not want to do it on my own unless I had to, and persuaded Siobhan, that if we trained, we could do it. An added incentive would be for us to be sponsored, raising money for our Mission Area weekend and Poynton Golden Memories, a charity that supports people living with dementia and their families. Training began, new walking boots and rucksack purchased, the trip booked - pre booked accommodation with some meals included, luggage transfers, travel arrangements made.

Reality set in as we left Sheffield and made our way to Sarria experiencing nervousness and excitement, hopes and fears. What follows is not my travelogue, but a few things I recognised matter deeply to me on the journey.

1. Community - At the start I said I was feeling lost, disorientated by the change in routine having returned to Sheffield. I realised that the structure of my days was important and the network of support from friends, family, colleagues and those within the community of St Mark's existed much more deeply than I'd felt. What I had to do was access them and ask for help! A genuine community is built on shared meaning, trust, mutual responsibility, and tradition. Communities and the relationships within them grow through having shared places, communicating and experiencing common practices.

2. Human connection and relationship - Just before we set off on the Camino, there was a period of time when it was unclear if I'd need to travel alone. Siobhan's family pulled together to ensure that she could make the journey. We both hoped the pilgrimage would be an opportunity to explore what was important to us in our lives, while sharing the adventure together. There were moments we walked separately for some parts of the day, seldom far apart. I was especially thankful that Siobhan was with me on the couple of days I was experiencing pain in my thigh as we negotiated some steeper downhill sections. Her friendship, conversation and empathy sustained me as she walked alongside me at a slower pace, encouraging me to keep going. We still had a set distance to cover to reach our accommodation, but she slowed down to walk at my pace and rhythm. We stopped more frequently for breaks, not just drinks and toilet stops, but for shared moments of healing and refreshment such as taking our boots off and sitting with our feet in the cool water. Before we left home, we had agreed that we would spent some time in prayer together and this happened in planned ways such as saying compline and sharing the Eucharist, but also spontaneously as we gave thanks for the beauty of the scenery and opened our hearts to growth through God's grace.

3. Nature - spending time in nature was an integral part of walking the Camino. Looking around at its beauty, it reinforced my belief that it is not a resource we were given to exploit, but a living presence on which we are dependent. It also offered moments of significance where I gained insight into the importance of letting go of expectations and concepts that can tie me down and restrict me and entering into the realm of *"unknowing" The* misty mornings alongside connection to Biblical passages were seen in a new light offering a greater depth of wisdom and a reminder that humans are participants in a larger living world, not detached observers. The beauty of some of the views meant heart and mind were more connected reminding

me that Human beings are embodied creatures, not just minds processing information. The physical act of walking strengthened my sense of rootedness in myself, more aware of the physical sensations and movement. I tried using walking poles which I'd been advised reduce the strain on knees and ankles, but where I could, I preferred having my hands free and my arms swinging. When My thigh was painful, I was very conscious of my feet touching the ground and the way I altered the way I walked down steeper sections of path. With ascents and descents, I was conscious how my breathing and pace changed. I noticed what my body was capable of, how it can carry me and get me to my destination for that day.

4. For me, the pilgrimage was not about getting somewhere quickly but about arriving more fully present to myself as well as in relationship with Siobhan as my travelling companion, and God. Many of the encounters I had with other people were meaningful, but momentary, with no expectation of permanence. I became more fully myself through openness to other people, to nature, and to realities beyond my immediate control, rather than through increasing withdrawing into isolation, which tends to be my default behaviour.

Ian McGilchrist, a psychiatrist, philosopher and neuroscientist, believes that human flourishing depends on recovering an awareness of interconnectedness. Community, friendship, art, ritual, and the natural world are not distractions from "real life"; they are among the primary ways we encounter reality. He argues that societies become healthier when they cultivate attentiveness, humility, and participation in living relationships instead of treating people and nature merely as objects to be measured, controlled, or optimised.

These ideas offer us a framework in which personal wellbeing, strong communities, and care for the natural world are deeply interconnected rather than separate concerns.
Jesus used this framework all the time.

- he gathered people who were searching for something beyond their presence experience of life. He observed what was going on in their lives and listened to their stories.
- Through his presence, ritual, example and parable he offered connections with the sacred - what we might call God, the Divine, Father, Son or Holy Spirit.
- Many of the stories he told had a link to nature - the parables

May we continue to bring these 3 worlds together as we gather and worship together and then go out into the world to nurture and care for one another and the environment on which we depend. **Shan**

THE POETRY OF PILGRIMAGE

Called -
gathered with faith in the love of Christ,
as a pilgrim in the Spirit,
seeking connection of body, mind and soul.
Putting aside the distractions of everyday life,
I open my heart and mind to Gods presence,
praying that I may experience
enlightenment and growth.

Searching for meaning in challenges encountered
I navigate the peaks and troughs of my existence.
I fall silent, and listen to the collective wisdom
of saints past and present.
Through pilgrim stories, my memory stirs
with echo's of my own history.
I joyfully recall places visited and people met
yet quietly whisper secrets untold
that remind me of of times
spent as a pilgrim walking in the dark.

In Christ's open arms I find the bridge,
that encourages me to draw near with faith,
to transcend the fear that disables me.
Through God's mercy I receive the holy sacrament
that nourishes me,
enabling me to continue my quest
for wholeness and truth.

I risk personal vulnerability by being honest
and let God guide me with grace.
New blessings come into focus,
drawing me towards the ever present light of Christ,
releasing me to function as a wounded healer
who despite my brokenness,
will once again receive the sacrament of healing
and leave this place to serve God as a pilgrim of hope.

Written in response to walking the Camino on a recent retreat

'BETTER STORY'



On Saturday 13 June I found myself sitting in Nero's coffeeshop looking out over the peace gardens at a far-right group called 'Raise the Colours' gathered to march to a hotel on Blonk Street where asylum seekers were living. There were maybe 80 to 120 people milling about, some England flags, a cross, a flag saying 'Jesus is King'. There were men, women and children of different ages, and a man talking and some music. The talk was primarily about the establishment being rotten and immigrants being not just undeserving of help but a threat to women, children and to (English) society. A sign remembering Henry Nowak was on the grass, and his murder was part of the anxiety, fear and blame being directed towards immigrants in what was being said. I felt a sense of unreality and confusion as I looked at slogans, heard the music and the talking – why was I there? How could I respond? I had joined a small group of Christians in Sheffield working across churches and denominations who had been connected via 'Better Story' – a Christian group concerned with a Christian response to the increasing tensions, and presence of far-right narratives, and the terror that they induce. 'Better Story' is equally concerned with how to think about and engage with those drawn to far right narratives and protests. There are no easy answers. We were unsure what to do on this day, and I if I'm honest, I was afraid, so to begin with we were getting a sense of what was going on.

I walked back with the two others who had joined me to where we had a cross made of flowers. We made a sign 'Jesus is kind' and decided to give out flowers to passers-by at the bottom of Fargate opposite the cathedral. We were near to the protest, and the many counterprotesters seeking to block the passage of the 'Raise the Colours' march. 'Would you like a flower? We want everyone to feel safe and welcome in Sheffield today' we tried to explain this odd act. I was surprised – I don't know why – that nearly everyone said yes. Only a few people referenced the march, and there was openness and concern. A young black man received a flower and then came back and asked to take a photo of us. A young Muslim woman and her friend wearing hijabs were smiling and friendly and then one said, 'you're going to make me cry'.

A middle-aged white woman said how uneasy she felt about the march, as she took a flower, frowning. We spoke with two counterprotesters who had assumed we were from the far right because we were holding a cross. We were ignored. We were watched (although not filmed, as many of the counterprotesters are). We handed out 50 artificial flowers, which seemed so little, and yet it filled my heart with gladness to be a presence, a Christian presence, in the midst of whatever is going on in this moment in the world, this country, this city.

There are so many ways to participate in the larger social moments of our time. I am constantly inspired and awed by the many acts of people in this church community at St Mark's who work tirelessly in so many different ways, whether working in the NHS, resourcing the most vulnerable, or campaigning for changes in mindset on the biggest issues of our time. I was recently quoted the end of George Elliot's novel Middlemarch, in its old fashioned and clunkly language it captures something essential about acting positively for change: 'The growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.'

Until I came across 'Better Story' I had no sense of what to do in the face of the forces of despair, hate and destruction that are active in this moment. www.betterstory.info has helpful articles and encouraging stories from across the country. There is a small group in Sheffield which usually meets to coordinate a response to a march. Please feel welcome to join if you would like to find out more.

Robyn

Poem by Phuc Luu

Migratory God
who uprooted Abraham
and led him into a foreign land
provide rest for your people
the stranger and alien
the refugee and wanderer
the one seeking sanctuary
settling in an unfamiliar place

Migratory God
who travels great distances
to become human
and live among us
dwelling in us
help us see that we all are restless
searching and seeking
finding that place of being and belonging
to lay our heads
as you who had no place
except with your people

Migratory God
who has crossed borders and boundaries
to be born a stranger
fleeing from country to country
feet moving for miles, over desert and dry places
into the Jordan River
where you cross from one land to the other
in the waters of baptism
where you wash off
ties to nation and citizen
so we might enter into a new
kingdom and country

Migratory God
who accompanies us in our journey
remind us of where we've been
from where we've come
so we might not forget
that we all traversed great distances
to find the place that our hearts seek to settle
that place all of us call home.

A DIFFERENT PENTECOST SUNDAY!



This story began around two months ago when I enquired of my elder nephew and partner what their son Ben would like from me for his 2nd birthday in early May. The suggestion came back of a Fireman Sam helmet! Apparently, Ben loved the books and TV films, and they were looking to create a full outfit for him. Intrigued, I turned to Google and was amazed to find a very wide range of firemen's' helmets and all items of supporting kit! I settled for a branded Fireman Sam helmet that was adjustable for head diameter and had a button to press that gave off all sorts of suitable sounds. Off it went to the Borders of Scotland – and thanks and some lovely photos duly came back.

In late May, Gill and I were holidaying in Scotland and spent our last few days based at my brother and sister-in-law's home about 20 minutes' drive away from Ben and his parents. My younger nephew also came down from Edinburgh for the weekend so all the Newtons (and a MacGregor!) could be together. We learned that on Sunday morning there was going to be an open session at the local fire station. Just perfect for Ben, of course, but very interesting for everyone. The village had several volunteer firefighters, and some were close neighbours of the Newton seniors! Ben duly arrived, in his now complete Fireman Sam uniform, topped off with the well-fitting helmet.

In glorious sunshine, we all set out about ½ mile down the road and on arrival at the fire station found it awash with a mass of humanity of all ages! Besides the fire engines, firemen and women, there were the police with a car and the mountain rescue team with interesting kit, face painting and lots of refreshments. It was very much participative, and Ben was overwhelmed and a bit shy but was soon being helped to use a real fire hose to knock down 3 large red wooden flames. For this he received a 'high five' from the firewoman on hand and loud applause from all the family.

Gradually, helped by his parents and grandparents, Ben gained in confidence and was soon sitting in the cab of the fire engine and ‘driving’ a police car while his mother and grandmother went up into the sky on the cage at the top of the extending ladder! All the men stood back and watched at a safe distance!

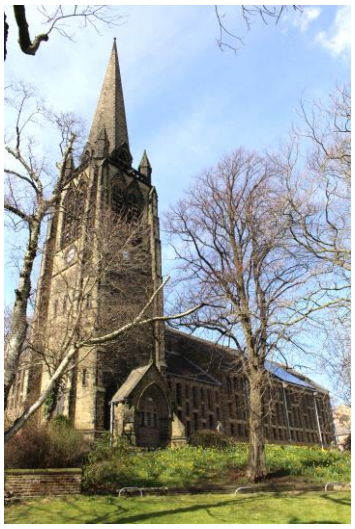
At this point we realised that we had lost Gill! Seeing the church across the road had its door open, I wondered if she had gone across to have a look inside. I went over and was greeted warmly at the door by a woman clutching a hymn book. I explained my mission was looking for my partner, and she looked a little crest-fallen, explaining that their service was about to start in 5 minutes and later, in the afternoon, there would be a tea party in the church garden. A quick glance round had told me that Gill was not there, so I made polite apologies and retreated to the fire station. Gill had emerged from inside the fire station having found herself a coffee!

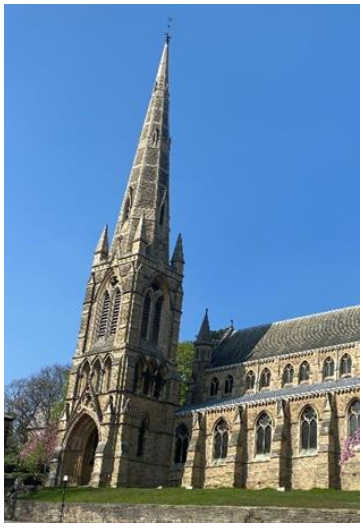
As the church door closed, with I think less than 10 people inside, families kept coming to the fire station. Clearly awareness and recruitment work was being done with adults and barriers broken for children and young people as well as indelible memories created for us all. Without exception, all the professionals and volunteers wanted to share their passion for the emergency services and help grow their successors.

Having had the brief encounter with the church, I could not help being deeply saddened that they had not seen and taken the opportunity to be part of the packed and happy gathering at the fire station. They might have changed the time of their service, been an active part of the celebrations and exemplified communicating with all the visitors ‘in their own language’. The afternoon tea could have become a full- blown morning refreshment stall and games with wind, fire and water could have complemented the other displays. Saving souls as well as bodies. No hard sell was necessary – just being there as part of the community and showing God’s love and presence in the everyday and the emergencies of life. To me, it was the church that was extinguishing the Pentecost flames rather than the fire service. For me, an unforgettable Pentecost Sunday for which I will always be grateful and remain impressed by the generosity and dedication of everyone involved.

Sandra Newton

GETTING TO KNOW THE CHURCHES IN OUR MISSION AREA





In preparation for our Mission Area Weekend, Bishop Leah invited each church to undertake a mapping exercise which would help us prepare and give her a better understanding of each parish. How we did this did not need to be the same style.

ST MARK'S
Living, Thinking, Loving Faith

At St Mark's we chose to invite the congregation to answer two questions on 21 June 2026: What drew you to St Mark's? What do you value about St Mark's? Frances Gray then correlated our responses as follows:

OUR CHURCH, MIDSUMMER DAY 2026

COME IN…

I arrived at birth! 43 years later…
It's my parish church.
My parish church!
I was born into it and it's my family and it feels like a community.
The people!
Friendly people.
Friendly, welcoming people.
The people I work alongside and the congregation I serve.
Weddings! Biscuits! Playing the piano!
Families

Intergenerational congregation and space to be yourself.
Feeling at home the moment I walked in.
The reality of being part of a ‘church family’ –
with huge numbers of children, young people, young adults and families

BELONG…

LIberal, open theology and practice.
Inclusivity and justice
LGBT inclusion
Open, inclusive and liberal views
All inclusive
A more intimate form of worship
without great distances separating the congregation and clergy
St Mark’s makes me feel accepted, welcome, valued, worthy
and that I am enough.

THINK…

The freedom to heresy
Thinking approach to faith
& explicitly inclusive nature of worship and practice.
Work on the bible reflecting scholarship as well as belief.
Exploring where I would do my curacy
A good mix of heart and head.

DO…

Living, thinking, loving faith –
Effective and deeply caring pastoral care
Not just words but put into action
Not afraid to speak up.
Live by values of love
So progressive – love the application to talking about social justice
Courageous and authentic commitment to equality and justice
Social engagement for causes of truth and justice
with unconditional open access for all people

FIND PEACE …

God!
The airiness of the building.
The uplifting architecture – even in the depths of winter!!
The choir ♥
The choir drew me and the people make it friendly
High quality music – performers and singers
We stayed for the music too!
I love the liturgy …. a thoughtful, changing liturgy across the year.
It makes me feel blessed to be here.

You will always feel welcome somewhere. **AMEN.**

ST MARY'S WALKLEY

The Church on the Road
Inclusive. Eucharistic. A safe place to be with God.

We are very obviously a church on the road
so close to the road that people do not notice that we are there.
salt and light in the community
(salt and light is so often not noticed until it is not there!)
Many people walk, ride and drive past.
We stand here for them all; people of faith,
People on the edge of faith and people of no faith at all.
We commit to pray regularly for all who pass this church
– travellers on the road.

Some will stop here for a moment
visiting the church or the community hall
(many of our hall users call the hall “church”)
They come in to pause for a while on their journey of life.
Everything that happens here (hall and church) should be rejuvenating
in some way – coffee, art, dance
and of course spiritual refreshment in the church
which is a place of memories and silent prayer.
They may join us for worship
in Holy Communion, praise and thanksgiving.

This is refreshment for the spiritual life
with prayers of thanks for help that they have had
and prayers for help as they leave on their journey,
with prayers for others who journey too.
We are an inclusive place of hospitality
for pilgrims on the journey of life.

Some will stumble into this place lost or in need of healing,
battered and wounded.
They will usually stay much longer for the safety and healing
that the church on the road can offer.
This place is like a haven to storm ridden ships.
Here like the monasteries of old, inner wounds can be tended,
as the battered ones turn to God for help and find or re-find, their faith
and start to see that Jesus travels with them on their journey.
Here they will receive the “map” of faith and learn how to read it;
here they will regain their inner strength
and become part of the community of the faithful for a while.
Here they will find healing in the Eucharist, the bread and wine of Christ,
and grow in strength with teaching and friendship
and when the time comes for them to leave
we will wave them off with our blessings and prayers as they travel on,
now lit up with the light of Christ within them.
We are a place of healing and teaching of the faith
to help those who journey find their way.

There are those who have always been here, part of the community
and those who are called to join us and work with us
to keep the church on the road as a place for others to come
– people of faith, on the edges of faith and of no faith at all.
These are the cleaners, coffee makers, welcomers, book keepers,
those who sit and wait with the doors open,
those who pray, teach and preach,
those who are stewards of the Baptism and Eucharist.
All of us who try to be gracious and generous to all
who come to this place of hospitality and openness
to keep it as a safe place to be with God.
It can be hard at times – being there for others,
but for those who are called
this church on the road is our journey, living as a holy community,
worshipping God and engaging in the mission of God in this place

– open to all who come – like the monasteries of old
but living and working in the world as well.
**We (the people) keep this safe place (the building)
to be with God so that anybody may come, some to visit,
some to stay and get help, some who are called by God to stay
in the service of this, the church on the road.**

ST JOHN'S RANMOOR
Naming the Angel of the Church

The colour of our church is (church life, not building) ...

The PCC described the church as yellow, reflecting a sense of warmth, welcome, joy and something special. A place of growth, life and renewal.

Our church building says...

The church building is seen as both impressive and inviting, with many noting the contrast between its imposing exterior and the sense of beauty, light and openness experienced inside. A place of heritage beauty.

The local context/culture can best be described as (e.g. fragmented, comfortable, friendly, frantic...)

Discussion of the local context highlighted a relatively privileged community, while recognising hidden needs, time pressures and challenges in helping people see the relevance of faith.

The history of this church is a story of...

It is a story of community that faced loss when the church was burned down in the late nineteenth century but the community rebuilt its purpose and continued to adapt whilst holding onto its heritage. Members reflected on the church's history of service, community engagement and social action, including support for education, community projects and charitable initiatives. The church has a long history of a strong choral tradition.

What we are trying to do here is...

The PCC identified the church's core purpose as:
a. Worship
b. Learning
c. Service

Members also highlighted a commitment to welcoming, serving and celebrating all people, while valuing the church's traditions alongside its willingness to embrace change through initiatives such as Inclusive Church and Eco Church.

The clergy/lay relationship can best be described as...

The relationship between clergy and laity was described as healthy, collaborative and empowering, with significant lay involvement in the life of the church. A spirit of partnership, trust and shared calling.

What is missing in the church is...

Areas identified for further development included sharing faith more confidently, strengthening evangelism and increasing awareness of the church's ministry beyond the parish. Members noted the importance of making the church's activities and resources more visible to the wider community.

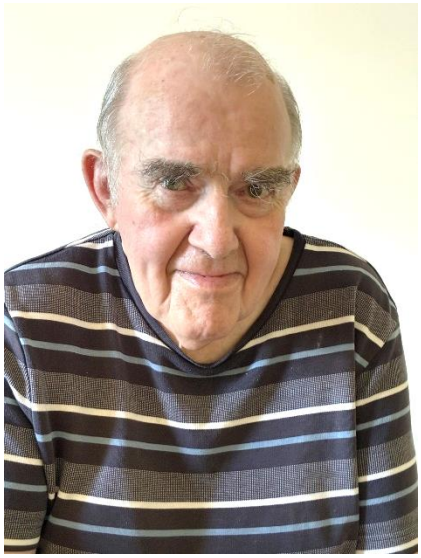
The best thing about this church is...

Its inclusivity, warm sense of belonging, worship and loyalty.

The angel of this church can best be described in terms of...

The exercise concluded with a reflection on the church's "angel" or personality. Members felt this was best represented by an image of compassion, healing, welcome and gentle service, reflecting the church's commitment to supporting both its congregation and the wider community. A place rooted in faith, reaching out in hope and caring in love.

LIFE IN A CARE HOME



Never in my wildest dreams or thoughts did I think I would end up at the age of 80, living in a Care Home.

The Home cares for over 60 adults, most of whom are elderly, some who have dementia or Alzheimer's, and others in the latter stages of life needing end of life care.

The building has a reception office situated near the entrance and is divided into four accommodation units along with a large kitchen and laundry. Each accommodation unit is named after an area of Derbyshire. The unit I live in caters for less seriously disabled people compared with the other units which are for residents needing higher levels of care, many of whom have mobility problems, some of whom are virtually bed-ridden. This prevents a few of them from taking part in a programme of activities that takes place throughout the week in a room specially designed for meetings which can accommodate a fair number of people. I have my own room with ensuite facilities and access to the internet.

I am unable to leave the Care Home without a responsible adult due to the diagnosis of a mild form of dementia. Even so, with the help of my wife, the carers and several other people I enjoy getting out when I can. I would still prefer to be living with my wife but know that this is no longer possible.

Having said that, in my case, life could be a lot worse for I have had an interesting and happy life despite losing a father at an early age and developing epilepsy during teenage years. Thankfully, these have never held me back. My wonderful wife visits me regularly and we have two grown-up children, each making their own way in their family lives.

Friends and relations, notably my wife, the church, my sister and a retired vicar, have been very helpful for they have gone out of their way to support me whilst in the Home. Generally, staff at the Home are very helpful and liven things up with conversations, advice and even exercise for it could be quite a sombre existence for some.

Despite dementia, I regularly do 500 piece jigsaw puzzles, enjoy healthy and sometimes quite lively discussions and even things such as fitness sessions which help break up the monotony of daily life. ***Robert Wilks***

SHEFFIELD THRESHOLD SINGERS

The Sheffield Threshold Singers came to St Mark's after the 10am service on Sunday 25 October to sing for us and share a short presentation about what they can offer for those at different thresholds in life, but especially at the end of life. Their songs have often been described as 'Lullabies for the End of Life' and are very simple melodies and harmonies repeated several times. Themes of peace, love, rest and gratitude are common.



RUSKIN COMES TO WALKLEY – AND ALSO TO TOTLEY



John Ruskin, artist, art critic, and Slade Professor of the History of Art at Oxford was a man of contradictions. Although describing himself as conservative, many of his utopian ideals had more in common with socialists. Whilst deeply concerned at the living conditions of the poor and anxious to improve those conditions he was at heart a believer in a hierarchy of the social order and inclined to ignore the views of those of lower social status. In 1871 he founded the Company (later the Guild) of St George which, as its website suggests, 'represented Ruskin's practical response to a society in which profit and mass-production seemed to be everything, beauty, goodness and ordinary happiness nothing'. Its work was largely focussed on three areas: the understanding of good art, craftsmanship (rather than mechanical production) and the rural economy. The first two of these perhaps informed Ruskin's choice of Walkley as the site of a museum – it was above the noise and squalid living conditions associated with the production of steel and offered the opportunity to improve the minds of those workers toiling in the furnaces and factories in the valley below. Moreover, he knew Henry Swan, an engraver, who lived in Sheffield and who was happy to act as Ruskin's agent.

Frances Gray's and David Price's well written, lively and well-paced production (appropriately performed at St Mary's) drawing not least on the latter's previous work on Sheffield radicals, comprised two separate but interlinked strands: the attempt by Ruskin to set up his museum in Walkley and the attempt by some socialists to set up a commune in Totley where all their goods could be shared. The story is told through the eyes of two narrators – Ruskin himself (Richard Carwardine) and Edward Carpenter. Carpenter, portrayed by John Schofield, was a former Cambridge don who, dissatisfied with an academic life, was drawn to living with people in the countryside. He acts as an acute observer of the unfolding drama.

It is Swan (John Newman) who acts as the link between the two strands, introducing Ruskin to the 'communists' who need money to buy a farm. Whilst Ruskin eventually provides this money the play beautifully draws out a number of inherent tensions in this arrangement. First, Ruskin's uncertainties about whether this was a project he wished to support resulting in Swan being in the unenviable position of go-between Ruskin and the 'communists' with both parties sure about their ideals but unsure how best to achieve them. Secondly those within the commune, balancing the need for money for their ambitions against the purity of their ideology - here Mary Berry's (Sue Newman) irascible defence of ideals against the cautious pragmatism of her fellow socialists was a delight, as was Edwin Priest's (Mark James) continuing and slightly exasperated attempts to find a consensus between competing voices. A further tension arose from the way in which individual members of the commune, each with their own trades based on an urban way of life, were expected to compromise with the demands of rural communal living. Finally, Ruskin's impatience at (as he saw it) the lack of progress on the farm resulted in his making periodic changes of manager thus only too clearly illustrating the gulf between his ideals and his understanding of the real conditions faced by the 'communists' and the values that they themselves endorsed, not least decision making by democratic processes.

It would be inappropriate to comment on individual performances in a collective endeavour, but the actors clearly enjoyed themselves and this added to the audience's appreciation of a very well performed production which kept everyone enthralled until its conclusion.

The question left hanging at the end concerns the success (or otherwise) of the two projects. Ruskin's museum in Walkley was undoubtedly successful, attracting visits from the great and the good as well as serving Ruskin's original purpose of offering opportunities for local working men and their families to view artefacts which they could not otherwise have seen. It no longer remains in Walkley and was subsequently absorbed into the Millennium Gallery. The attempt at 'communism' was ultimately unsuccessful but as Henry Swan notes at the end, 'those involved learned much from it.' Its contribution to the progress of socialism in Sheffield is not to be ignored.

Michael Hunt



Godly Play and OutoftheBox: Same Spirit, Different Callings

Many people encounter OutoftheBox and ask: how does this relate to Godly Play? Understanding what these two approaches share, and where they diverge, helps us appreciate each more fully and opens up more opportunities for reflective storytelling to be used appropriately.

Their Beginnings

Godly Play was developed in the US by Episcopal priest Jerome Berryman starting in the 1960s, eventually evolving into a formalised curriculum. OutoftheBox was established in Sheffield by Kathryn Lord and Kate Caroe in 2021 in response to COVID, and is a not-for-profit membership organisation.

What They Share

Both are rooted in the gentle art of reflective storytelling — a way of being with stories that creates space for people to reflect and connect. Both use simple objects, both tell stories with slowness and intention, and both invite people to respond with curiosity and to wonder openly and creatively. They both hold a space that is safe, respectful and kind: fostering an engaged, empathetic and grounded presence, following a predictable rhythm, offering language (verbal and non-verbal) to give shape to the inexpressible, and valuing silence.

Where They Differ

The clearest difference is purpose. Godly Play nurtures childhood Christian faith and spirituality to transform thinking and practice for the whole of life. It



offers an in-depth curriculum travelling through the Church Year, with the explicit aim of teaching Christian language and drawing children deeper into its story.

OutoftheBox helps people of all ages think and talk more deeply, for improved wellbeing of individuals and groups. It uses stories as a springboard into reflection and dialogue using loose parts play. OutoftheBox stories invite people to make meaning from human experience drawing on a variety of sources as inspiration such as legends, children's stories, life experiences, sacred texts, poetry and history. It is used with both adults and children in community groups, board meetings, hospitals, schools, churches - wherever people want to connect and value reflection and deeper dialogue.

The purpose behind their use of wondering questions reflects this difference. Godly Play uses wondering questions to foster theological enquiry. OutoftheBox uses similar but different questions, and these help people notice where they feel energised and where they feel resistance and to connect those reactions to other parts of their life. The aim is a more holistic, emotionally-aware perspective, rather than theological formation.

How They Use Stories

In Christian contexts, the contrast between the two approaches becomes instructive.Godly Play presentations work with the full richness of the biblical narrative, including identifying details, liturgical language, and theological depth. The story itself is the content — and helping participants enter it, inhabit it, and be shaped by it is the goal.

OutoftheBox Christian stories, by contrast, deliberately strip away identifying features of a story, retaining only the details essential for reaching the heart

of the wisdom. This is intentional: it allows people to see familiar material afresh, to imagine themselves more easily in the story, and to engage in critical questioning without the weight of prior association. OutoftheBox stories maintain a distinct identity that aims to be fresh, open-ended, inclusive, playful and concise, making them different and complementary to Godly Play.

Community Play: The Heart of OutoftheBox

The most distinctive difference is that in OutoftheBox, story and wondering are only the opening. The main emphasis is Community Play — a loose parts play process that deepens dialogue with lightness and humour across three stages:

1. Landscape (how are you feeling?)
2. Metaphor (a question from the wondering, connected to an image in the story)
3. Figure (where are you in this?)

Together they facilitate what Otto Scharmer calls presencing — to let go, let be, and let new ideas come. This is his Theory U, and the inspiration for the OutoftheBox logo.

Same Spirit, Different Callings

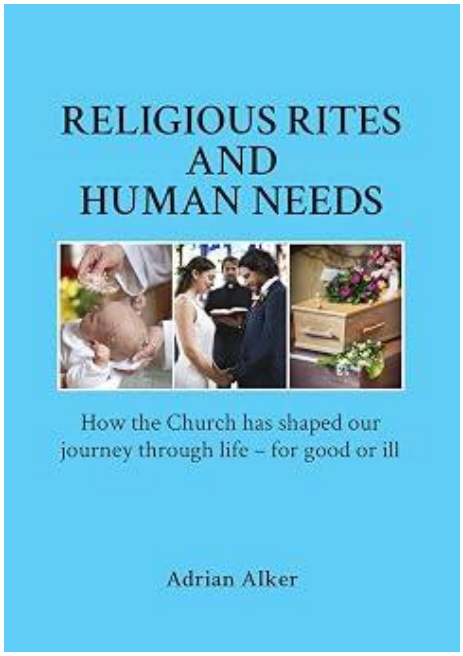
Godly Play and OutoftheBox are kindred spirits with different callings. Godly Play goes deep into Christian formation, particularly with children. OutoftheBox takes the contemplative, storied spirit of that approach and carries it into the full breadth of human life — into workplaces, care homes, schools, therapeutic settings, and community groups, for people of any faith or none. OutoftheBox is a membership organisation that provides online story scripts and regular online members' meetings to support storytellers to develop in their work.

Being clear about these differences helps us signpost people well, discover more contexts where stories can be shared, and grow the overall audience for reflective storytelling. And that, ultimately, is something both approaches are glad to see.

Find out more about OutoftheBox and Godly Play at outofthebox.org and godlyplay.uk

BOOK REVIEW:

RELIGIOUS RITES AND HUMAN NEEDS by Adrian Alker



Many of you will know Revd. Adrian Alker from the twenty years he spent as vicar of St Mark's, when, in 2003, he established the Centre for Radical Christianity, hosted by St Mark's Church. It quickly became a nationally recognised intellectual and worshipping resource for liberal Christians. One of its lasting legacies has been a series of booklets (most of which we have in the Church Library) that offer succinct, accessible and original contributions on topics relating to faith, written primarily by writers from within the liberal Protestant fraternity. Adrian edited them, and they convey interesting analysis and reflection on several theological themes, often expressed in a small number of words. One can say the same about his new book, *Religious Rites and Human Needs.*

In this volume, Adrian reflects on the decline the Church of England has seen in its levels of affiliated membership and religious observance that one can trace back to the early 1960s. There has been much work done this, and the impact it is having on church and society in England, and Adrian's book makes an original contribution to this field of study. From his perspective, as anyone who has read his earlier book *Is a Radical Church Possible?* will know, this has been, in large part, a result of what he describes as the church's 'lack of honesty and openness when it comes to exploring and questioning the claims of the Christian Church.

Liberals, radicals, modernists, those who challenge or doubt, have been labelled the ‘enemy within.’ (p. 6).

He laments the loss of church buildings, seeing them as part of the country’s rich architectural heritage that should be persevered and revitalised, not least owing to the central role they have often played in local communities as hubs for social engagement, expression and welfare provision. He also laments the decline in the perceived importance of the rituals that are often referred to as Christian ‘rites of passage’: Baptism, Marriage and Funeral Services, as examples. This is not just because of their role in Christian experience, which he values; he also sees them as important milestones in people’s lives which should be marked by ceremony, or at least some form of civic endeavour.

What makes this book unique and original is the way that Adrian draws parallels between the life of the Church of England and that of his late mother, Nellie, who died in 2021 at the age of 104.

He looks back on her life and sees how important the rites of passage ceremonies were to her development as a committed Christian, citizen, and to her legacy.

There is a strong sense that we may not know the full significance of what we have in these rituals (and the same could be said of the Church of England) before it is gone, when it may be too late to recover. Yet, it would be wrong to characterise this book as an exercise in nostalgic reverie; rather, I would describe it as a work of thoughtful reflection on all that Christian faith and life can bring to those who encounter it with an open, questioning, mind and spirit.

There is a rhythm to Christian life that comes from regular, communal worship, and which the rites of passage play an important contribution in the way they record moments of particular importance on our Christian journey. It is a way of life that is worth defending, and this book is a valuable contribution to that endeavour.

Joe Forde

Copies of the book can be obtained by emailing Adrian at:
adrian.christine@googlemail.com
A copy has also been placed in the Church Library.

CELEBRATIONS ON OUR JOURNEY'S



Renate and Siobhan complete the Spiritual Growth and Transformation course



Cicely's 90th



Flowers for David and Mary Janes Golden Wedding



Beth's Book Launch



Philip and Mahmud's birthdays



Members of St Marks join in at St Marys well dressing



Life's end

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