

ST. JOHN'S CHURCH

157 ST. JOHN STREET LAUNCESTON

PARISH OFFICE 9.00 am to 4.00 pm Ph. 314896



BRANCHING OUT

*Exploring Pathways
To Vital Living*

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INTRODUCTION

Have you ever wondered about the people behind the "small talk"? the richness of their experiences? We felt the need to produce a booklet with local identity that removed the masks and revealed how God has been active in their lives. We feel sure that as you turn the pages you will relate to, and identify with, the contributions from some of the members of the Community of St John's. We are greatly indebted to them for their candid openness and honesty, which we know took great courage on their part.

We couldn't fail to see the parallel of these testimonies to the Seasons: Winter storms saw needs of Someone strong to hold onto in the buffeting winds; Summer drought and times of dryness, a seeking deeper for refreshing waters to revive them; the freshness of Spring in finding new pathways to skip along; or rediscovering a neglected faith in all its richness, like the colours of Autumn.

What struck us was, in the midst of a constantly changing, confused world, the need to discover the reality of God's constant love behind all change. For indeed "there is a time for every purpose under heaven..." (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

So will you walk with us through the Seasons, exploring their uniqueness and how they display God's creative hand, personally transforming each individual from their weakness to His strength. For in His wisdom God knows that like the plants, we need different times, positions and seasons to grow and flourish.

SUMMER



ANOTHER NEW DAY

God will be there
In His Heaven tomorrow
The same as He was
Today
The sun will arise
The flowers will bloom
The rivers will flow on their way.

No matter what happens
Whatever your sorrow
Whatever the hurt
be assured
There's another new day
for living
rejoicing
Another new day
that is yours.

Karen Rene

CALL FOR HELP

I came to Launceston from overseas about two years ago with the hope of doing a Refresher Course in Nursing. As a single mother I was grateful for the offer made by relatives to help me with my three children. However, things did not work out as planned. Language problems made the course very difficult and this led to sickness and depression. I was eventually forced to give up. My relatives had been very supportive with the children but because of the distance between our homes, the times I was able to accept their help were limited.

A contact with a worker from the City Mission was the beginning of an awareness that there is something beyond the day-to-day problems of work, language, isolation and providing for the children. He spoke of his spiritual growth and how, through trust, he obtained peace. After talking to a staff member from St John's church I was further encouraged and motivated to search for, and be more aware of, the spiritual side of life.

Soon the spiritual dimension was really starting to work in my life and my faith was strengthened. Through trusting the Lord I found I was increasingly receiving His guidance. By accepting God's ruling in my heart I recognised that He is love and that His standards are to be used to bring up the children in love. I constantly strive for these standards. I found it was very important for me to talk with the Lord, not only by taking time to get my thoughts together at the start of each day and giving thanks for the new day, but also in many other situations during the day: whether in the garden, while driving or while doing the housework. These are times to think freely, clarify problems, let faith take over, and grow spiritually.

Worshipping at St John's has given me a real sense of belonging to the Christian family. There is a sense of common, shared purpose. The recent baptism of my children was a time when I was acutely aware of the working of the Holy Spirit. It is a joy to know that love will increasingly flow from my children as they talk about the Lord. My response to myself, other people and to situations has changed dramatically in recent times. I have learnt to accept the situation I am in no matter how difficult the situation. I can be confident knowing God's love is there. On one occasion I was torn between catching up on work at home and giving in to children desperate to go swimming. I gave in. We gathered all our gear together and set off happily. After about 10 metres the car came to a sudden stop - a broken clutch cable. A year ago the circumstances and the resulting financial strain would have made me cry. This time I laughed.

Financially, things have been hard, even without broken clutch cables! However, I know the Lord is looking after us. We can also rely on the Lord to supply the love we need to encourage and help others and be at peace in our contacts with them.

Ps 90:12 "Teach us, ...that we may gain a heart of Wisdom."



WHY I CHOSE TO REMAIN SINGLE

I often wonder about that myself but deep down I know it is the Lord who has called me to remain single in order for me to have the time needed to do the work He has called me to. St Paul in his letter to the Romans Chapter 12: 1-8 tells how some are called to be various things and I feel he could have said some are called to remain single to serve the Lord in special and various ways. In my case it is to serve in the work of the Church, especially around Children's ministry and contemplative prayer as a member of a secular order within the Anglican church.

Years ago I had no worth, or I felt I had no worth, but when I asked Jesus to take control of my life - to break me and re-build me to what He wanted - then I found real joy: the joy of serving Him and having Him as my Lord and master, as well as a friend I can turn to at all times. And so I seek to serve Him and Him alone - He knows what is best for me, though I sometimes question it, but find out He is right. For me to do what I believe I am called to do, requires me to remain single. St Teresa sums it up best:

"Christ has no body now but yours; no hands, no feet on earth but yours; yours are the eyes through which He looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good. Yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are His body."

1 Corinthians 7:6 "...But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another."



TAKE TIME AND BE TENDER

I am happy to have a spiritual home at St John's.

I like the variety of services, the provision of Morning and Evening Prayer some Sundays, as well as regular Communion.

It is also good to have the Songs of Praise as I enjoy these modern choruses, but also with my Anglican background, like to keep the traditional hymns and Church music. I think it is great to have such a wonderful choir, especially for Sung Eucharists and the Celebration of special festivals.

I feel I have been accepted here and have made friends from all age groups and enjoy the work I am doing with young people. I am thankful for the opportunity to serve in this way.

I have been impressed with the emphasis of Scripture, and the fact of no political sermons. I feel hymns at 8 o'clock and also hymns for Wednesday, make services more meaningful.

St John's provides me with the opportunity to learn and grow in my Christian faith, and to also serve God in my particular field of work. After the Sunday Service I feel refreshed and strengthened for life in the coming week.

Ps 13:1 "I will praise you O Lord, with all my heart."

CHOOSING WHAT GOD WANTS

I became a Christian in 1978 at the age of 35. During 1980, whilst working as a planning officer with the Tamar Regional Master Planning Authority (TRMPA), I began to ask the Lord in prayer to guide me in how to serve Him. A few months later, a delegation from a group seeking a christian radio broadcasting licence, asked the TRMPA for demographic information. I was assigned to provide it. After working with these people for a while, the Lord seemed to be gently impressing on me that this was His answer to my prayer.

In time I stopped preparing the information at work, but volunteered to work with them in my spare time. They accepted me, and I became Secretary/Co-ordinator of the organisation that is now Launceston Christian Broadcasters Inc., or WAY FM. This became a faith based missionary organisation. Thus, all staff and management worked on a voluntary basis.

By mid 1984 much preliminary work had been undertaken (PR, lobbying, etc), and the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal hearing to decide on the licence was listed for August, 1984.

Also, by mid 1984 I had been promoted to Director of TRMPA, a post with a high salary and considerable influence and prestige. However, for several years during my quiet times with the Lord, I had been mulling over whether or not to join the radio group full time if the licence was granted. The Lord gently allowed me two years to ponder the idea, and I knew deep within me that I should. By mid 1984 I had to make a decision, because I knew the Tribunal would require firm information about the future leadership of the station.

At that time the curate of St John's was a former vet, who had left his profession to join the priesthood. We met one day outside the parish office, and he shared with me his decision to leave his profession had been made earlier because the Lord had gradually taken away the job satisfaction he had once enjoyed. I realized that this was the very situation I was in too. The Lord had taken away the satisfaction of the career I had loved for so long, and replaced it with a love for working in christian radio.

Was the end decision easy? No, it was not. But I volunteered to become the first Station Manager, and started full time in January 1985. Our licence was granted in May 1985, and we went to air in July 1986, and since then the ministry has expanded and improved.

Looking back after five and a half years in Christian radio, I now know that the Lord used that encounter in the Parish Centre courtyard, to reduce my fear of the unknown. The Lord's guidance is gentle but firm. He will give you time to adjust your free will to His will for you. When decision time comes, it will be after adequate time and preparation. You will KNOW it is right. Then, and only then, you must take that leap of faith into the unknown.

Have I survived? Most certainly! The Lord has supplied my needs, and He has helped me learn to do without my wants. The salary and prestige of my former job do not matter anymore. Every day 7 WAY FM runs, the Lord gives me the ultimate satisfaction of knowing I am useful in helping to carry out His Great Commission. Each day is filled with new and interesting challenges which I know the Lord has prepared for me in advance. I am happy and fulfilled, and I look towards the future with excitement.

Proverbs 8:10 "Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold."



TEENAGER IN THE CHURCH

Being a teenager in a Church is enjoyable! It gives me a chance to cope with the pressures of life and just be myself. I can enjoy, and be grateful for, the life that God gave me and I enjoy teaching and helping young children to appreciate the life and love that God offers.

I can seek wisdom from older members of the Church and learn from the experiences of others.

I enjoy spending time with other members of God's family.

In a Church I think what you get out of the Church Community is what you give to it.

No pretences have to be made, no act has to be put on for the members of a Church Community and I think that any teenager would benefit from the environment and support that a Parish, especially one as close as St John's, could offer.

1 Timothy 6:17 "Put your hope in God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment."

CHRISTIAN - WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

What does being a Christian mean to me - a woman who happens to have been born in the US - and now a permanent resident in Australia. This is really unimportant except for the word "Christian."

I was born a Christian and brought up in a family where going to church was very important. My faith of being a Christian did go through some highs and lows during my married life, but my biggest "high" was being confirmed along with my husband at St John's in 1979. It was such a pleasure watching him take communion following confirmation.

The "family" of St John's has been a real comfort to me, because I have no relatives in Australia. The friendship and support from St John's parishioners have been a tremendous encouragement to me. That support, and especially my husband's support, has enabled me to accept new challenges in first taking Bethel studies, then as a lay reader and then the additional load of preaching (which truly has been a learning experience). Delving into the Scriptures is like peeling an onion - doesn't look like much on the outside, can cause you to cry, have to unwrap it in layers, can be used in a variety of ways, but there can be such ecstasy and enhancement in the eating!

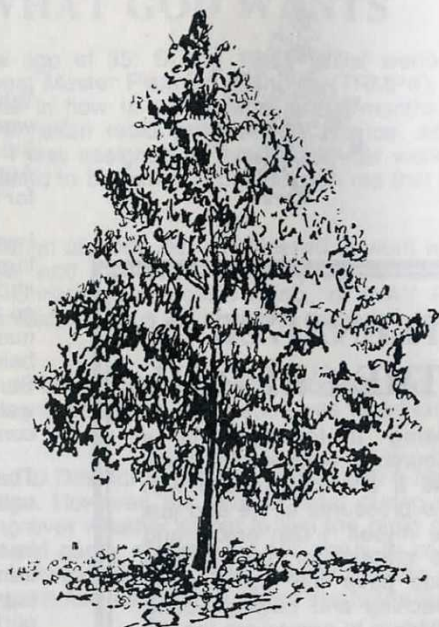
One Easter I participated in a parish door knock and visitation. A real thrill was to see one of those I had visited attending church occasionally. If we move back to the city, I would like to spend more time visiting in the Parish.

I also remember my time as a member of the choir. It helped me to learn about singing Psalms and to get to know new hymns and refresh myself on old ones. The singing of Psalms is a musical discipline, which takes practice. I am still trying to master it!

Whatever the service, and it is nice to have variety, I feel at home at St John's and I hope I reciprocate and make others feel at home at St John's.

1 Peter 4:16 "As a Christian do not be ashamed."

AUTUMN

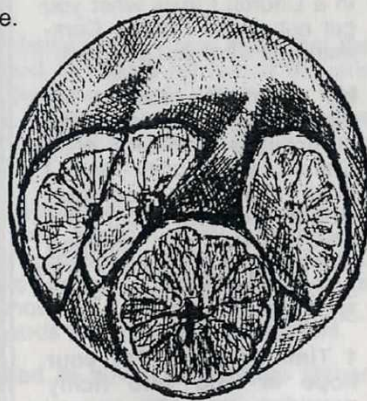


SQUEEZED LIKE AN ORANGE

An orange sitting on a plate may look nice. But it is not fulfilling its function until it is squeezed, if it is ever to allow its aroma to flow forth.

In all kinds of trials we too are like an Orange. We need to be broken open so that our faith may be proved genuine.

Our prayers we offer may have no suction to draw down God's Blessing unless we believe in God's love and we respond to our suffering with Love and Trust in God.



A FIRE FOR COLD HEARTS

In 1971 my husband and I were living in the USA, he was finishing his last year of University. We had been married for two years and although we wanted to start a family, I was told I couldn't become pregnant. Without warning, I became very ill and it was necessary for me to undergo heart surgery. It was at the same time my husband was studying for his final exams. Thankfully the operation was successful.

Then came a harsh blow - I was pregnant. The developing baby was at severe risk due to X-rays and tests in relation to heart surgery. I was very confused. Well meaning professionals advised an abortion. Still in a convalescent state, without close family support, I did not know which way to turn. I spent most of my time playing 'what if', being swayed one way then the other by various advisers.

My husband was my support. Being a Christian, he was steadfast in his assertions that the Lord was with us, including the baby. This was my first experience of being strengthened by another's faith.

During the following years we settled in Tasmania, had two more children and my health was good. Work transferred us throughout the State and our lives were full. Our involvement with church activities varied with the different places we lived.

Mid 1987 we were living in Launceston (no extended family, few friends). My husband's father told us he was coming to visit. It would be the first time he had seen our children, the youngest was then 13. We had heavy financial commitments and were finding the everyday coping with three teenagers very stressful.

Again I became ill, and after a period of hospitalization, I was on the waiting list for heart surgery in Melbourne. This was another severe blow. The rector was very supportive and introduced us to a Faith & Fellowship group who were very helpful and great friends. Still I worried about how the children would manage, who would care for them, while I was in Melbourne; would I recover from surgery; how could we meet financial commitments?

One day as I was once again going over these problems I felt the presence of the Lord. There was complete calm and absolute comfort while the Lord assured me He would be with me. From that time my worries abated. First, a date to be in Melbourne, just two days after my father-in-law's arrival. This presented a new problem - should we put off the operation? his trip? Then the Lord slipped in. My sister-in-law kindly agreed to come to Melbourne so my husband (with reservations) would stay here with the children and his father.

Once again the Lord worked through the doctors and nurses and I recovered very quickly. The children had a lovely time getting to know their grandfather, who had a memorable holiday and spent time getting to know his son again. Since his return to America his health has deteriorated, and it is clear he could not have delayed his trip.

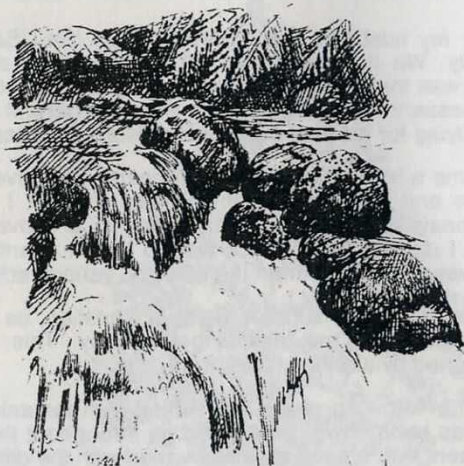
Through our lives we have faced our share of difficulties, but in times of personal crisis the Lord has strengthened our faith and guided (and where we couldn't see directed) us. He has worked through many people, giving us friends, especially in the Faith & Fellowship group, when we have most needed it.

Malachi 3:2 "For He shall be like a refiner's fire."



HIDDEN COURAGE

We all have hidden
Courage
But it takes a cruel
Blow
A turn of fate
That hurls us down
And leaves us
Empty
Low
Before we find
Our inner worth,
Before we understand
That the iron fist
Of circumstance
Can be a helping
Hand.



LOOKING BACK ON THE PAST 20 YEARS "DOWN UNDER"

I came to Australia twenty years ago with my husband and two children - leaving our eldest daughter to complete her studies for the Bar. I did not want to go and leave my daughter behind. So on our arrival I was homesick and depressed and my two children were lost and lonely being separated from their peers.

However, after a short time one went to Monash and my son to Matric, my husband settled into his Doctoring. I was struggling alone to show a brave face.

Life for me in a new country was more than a strain, I felt like Moses' Israelites: "Why did we ever come?"

Since confirmation I had believed and had faith in God - sometimes that faith is thin and doubt creeps in - but as I look back I can see that my prayers have been answered.

One day in those first months a near neighbour managed to persuade me to go with her to a Bible Study Group. (I should add it took a lot of work on her part!) It was not the ordeal I envisaged. I made friends and even began to enjoy the meetings. I still do and the support of those delightful women that I first met so long ago. I am so glad I made the effort.

Life, of course, has been full of highs and lows, but faith and fellowship with other Christians make living so much easier. Now it is the 1990s - not the 1970s - my husband is enjoying retirement, my eldest daughter has joined us having achieved her goals. My second daughter is a married and my son is flourishing in Canberra.

Today I have so much to be thankful for and I praise God for my beloved family and many blessings from beloved friends.

Exodus 3:12 "God answered, 'I will be with you...'"

DIVORCE

Divorce - me? Impossible! Didn't I make promises to Almighty God, as well as the man I married? And yet this man, in his greater wisdom said, "It's no good. I want a divorce." This after 28 years of marriage.

Well, there I was. What was the next step? Prayer, of course, and counselling with my very wise minister. He did not offer advice. He only asked questions that led me to really look at our marriage without "rose coloured glasses". "What do you do for fun together?" he asked. "Do you talk together about important things?" "Do you communicate your real feelings to each other?" On and on he went over a period of time - never condemning, never taking sides always conciliatory - yet, forcing me to face issues squarely. When I could face the fact it was an empty marriage, I was ready for the next steps.

But what? Well, sure there were lots of tears but still I knew God had always taken care of me and I'd just better get on with living. I vowed I would not grow to be a bitter, whinging woman. I had wonderful friends and I wanted to keep them!

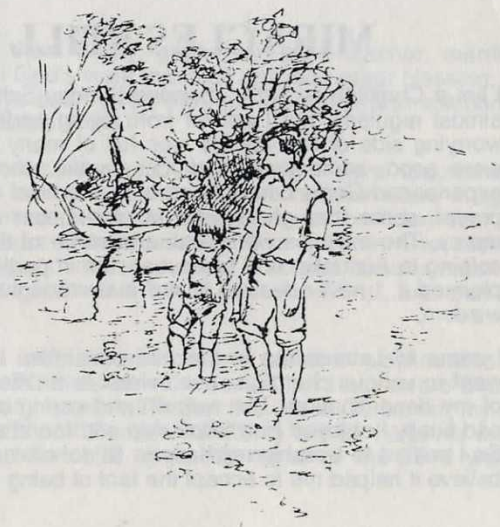
So I thought about how I'd never really served God as much as I'd wanted. Here was a chance. The church was desperate for a youth leader - I volunteered and loved it. The local Historical Society needed help in our museum. Good fun. I took a night class - wonderful! I changed occupations and became a Lab & X ray Technican for a local doctor. I really felt the Lord's call to this job. When you have a very worried, scared patient turn into a relaxed, cheerful patient, while you work on them, you feel good about yourself and the job you're doing - I loved our patients.

And so I built a whole new interesting life, with God's help. I tried to look ahead - not back. Another most important thing was to pray for my husband's happiness, that he would find the fullness of the Lord and there find the only true success that has any meaning.

This was 16 years ago. The Lord has been so good to me, providing for all my needs. Constantly putting the right people in the right places to help me grow. That's not to say it's always easy or that I know most of the answers but I do know— if you depend on the Lord, He will **never** forsake you.

Steps to follow:

- Get Christian Counselling
- Keep your old friends
- Make new ones
- Widen your fields of interest
- Stretch your mind
- Love and serve mankind
- Love and serve the Lord in tangible ways
- PRAY.....**
- for your marriage partner
- for others
- for yourself in all of the above



CARING CONGREGATION

Shortly after being given the nature of my husband's illness, on the day he was coming home from hospital, it was more than coincidence that our smiling friend emerged from the lift just a few feet from where we were sitting. On hearing the news, he quietly talked, then took control and we were on our way home. We accepted his arrival as God's provision at that time...

Prior to, during and after, surgery in the New Year, we were assured of Parish prayer support which gave us a sense of quiet and peace. Following the surgeons' confirmation as to the extent of the illness, I began to fully appreciate the value of a comforting hand from a dear lady of the Parish who had taken me to the hospital.

Days after my husband's return home, a crisis developed and it was hospital again, and necessary to try and get family members home. The minister was very supportive and helpful and the prayer chain contacted. The many prayers were answered as my husband came home and his condition improved. We were given this extended time for loving and caring as a family. We gave thanks for each day.

Visits from the clergy were special and much appreciated. The areas of practical assistance from the Parish were: transport to the hospital and doctors - even on a wrong appointment day! Food came often; a television was loaned for the bedroom; friends called and some would stay while it was necessary for me to be away for short periods. Cards, letters and flowers were sent in support, and an offer, for gardening or work around the home, was received and appreciated.

Also available to me were comforting arms around my shoulders on my infrequent attendances at church, and the "ears" of a lady who realises and understands, the value of listening, a truly wonderful gift.

Later, because of the delay in delivering an order for firewood, a parishioner found some for us at his home; he also cut kindling. The offer to prune the roses was accepted and a time of witness shared during the process. I am ever humbly thankful for the love and caring shown to my husband and myself during his illness, and trust I have learnt from the experience.

John 21:16 "Jesus said: 'Take care of my sheep'."

MIRACLES STILL HAPPEN NOW

I am a Christian by birth, attended Sunday Schools as a teenager, and went to church almost regularly, but I am far from being perfect. Mostly I am on the pessimistic and worrying side of life. My life was full of many experiences and exciting events, some were good, some were bad, but on the whole satisfactory. Time and time again I experienced God's caring hand in the form of actual miracles. Some were through my prayer, some through prayers of others, but mostly through God's grace and loving mercy. The miracles were real, and some of them happened in Launceston. Even my coming to Australia, and to Launceston in particular, was nothing but a miracle: I never planned it, I never desired it, nor even thought of it, and even now I wonder about its wisdom.

I came to Launceston in the mid seventies. My family followed shortly afterwards. I went to various churches, each week to a different church because there is no church of my denomination. The warmth and caring of St John's prompted me to visit again, and finally I enjoyed true fellowship and found depth of faith and a caring congregation. So I settled to worship regularly in St John's and it made a big difference to me, and I believe it helped me to accept the fact of being isolated in Launceston.

Life in Australia - not from the financial side - was not all roses as I had thought before coming, especially for a non-European migrant. I suffered a lot of hardships and discrimination in my professional work, despite my wide experience and seniority. I was totally drowned in my work, not even having enough time to rest or think quietly. Marital problems emerged and intensified, but God's hand was there and helped me to endure. Growth in faith always is the fruit of hardships, so I started to push worries and pessimism aside trusting that "His will" be done.

Now I can understand - from personal experience - God's teaching that our faith is more precious than gold, yet gold is tested and purified by fire. May the Lord be always praised and glorified. Amen.

2 Corinthians 12:12 "And miracles were done among you..."

TAKE GOD SERIOUSLY

A child of migrant refugee parents, I was brought up in the prosperous and peaceful 1950s, and was a teenager in the 1960s. My mother had a strong faith in God, and I grew up believing in God, and accepting without question the doctrines of the church. As a teenager, however, I succumbed readily to peer pressure, and my life was far from what I knew to be God's standard.

It was not till I was twenty years old that I found myself in a desperate situation. I realised that if I had died there and then, I would have been buried in shame and disappointment by those who loved me. I knew that I needed God's help, and I prayed. The result was immediate! In a few minutes, my fear and despair lifted, and I resolved to change my behaviour and serve God.

What happened was no surprise to those who know God's ways. While I was given the strength to fulfil one resolution, I made excuses about other evils that I held on to, and found that, presented with temptation, I easily succumbed to others again. Looking back, however, I have noticed that while my willpower was totally inadequate, God prevented me from having the things I had no strength to resist. And just a few weeks later I was invited to a Christian coffee shop where I came across young people talking and singing about Jesus. They showed me a faith in the person of Jesus which I lacked. It was a real turning point. God's word in the Bible was opened to me, and step by step, the Holy Spirit gave me victory over temptation and clear direction in life's decisions.

God has greatly blessed me since then. Study, graduation as a teacher, marriage, children, employment, involvement in God's work, have all provided great blessing, and what is more important, I have always been given the right guidance and solutions to the trials and difficulties that are inevitable in life.

How does a Christian apply faith in secular work? Occasionally I have opportunity to share aspects of my faith with other teachers, and it is surprising how often, in lighter moments or more serious, I am given credit for my faith. I am also confident that faith helps me to be cheerful, encouraging and hard working. The children also seem to respond well to the gifts God has given me, and while I do not directly teach the Christian faith, I always let each class know that I trust in Jesus Christ, and that they would do well to do the same.

What is clear to me is that those who know me well can see plenty of weaknesses and flaws in my behaviour. I desire to lead others to know Jesus, but I am aware that my example alone will not do this. I remind myself in this that it is Jesus Christ, not my own performance, that has saved me, and that if God answered my call for help, He will do the same for others, for **"everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13).**

WINTER



A MESSAGE OF LOVE TO AN ABUSED CHILD

My child, I have provided you with a family
They are the body of Christ here on earth
They are my children - my precious loved ones.

My family will not wilfully hurt you or wound you
As your own family did.
They will protect you and care for you
Like the loving parents I would have wished for you.

They will be my arms to hold and hug you
My feet, to run to you when you need me.
They will speak my words of comfort to you when you are distressed.
For Jesus is the head of this family.

So many times I have seen you cry,
Your body marked and wounded tore at my heart.
I felt anguish for the suffering you went through and grief that your parents should pass on
That which was done to them.
I saw it all.

Let me gently take down the barriers
You have had to put up to protect yourself.
I am a loving heavenly Father who can be trusted.
I can heal your raw, open wounds and mental scars.
I can restore you into a person of beauty - if you'll let me.

Linda Fawkes, Scunthorpe

EXPECTING PERFECTION - ACCEPTING HUMANITY

We considered ourselves Christians, both having had a similar Christian background. So when we decided to be married we approached our nearest Anglican Church (which happened to be St John's) and assumed that our wish for a religious ceremony would be honoured.

However, this was not going to be as straight forward as we had first thought. The rector of the day was hesitant in providing this service to so called strangers without firstly the couple demonstrating a commitment to the faith, and becoming an active member of the Parish family. This was complicated by one of us having been previously married and the rector needed to be further reassured that our intention was sincere. So began our weekly vigil at St John's.

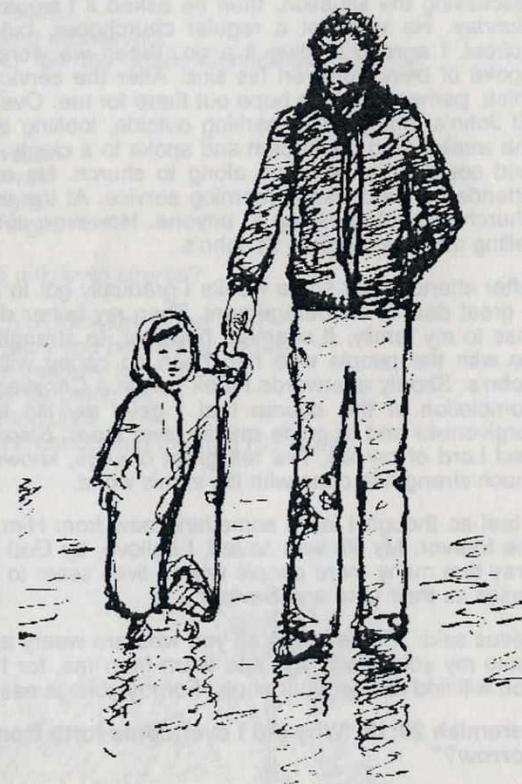
At first we felt isolated and humiliated at being put through a time of testing. We wondered if it was really necessary, and seriously considered a civil ceremony. However, in our hearts we knew that our marriage had to have the blessing of our Lord, so we persevered.

As time went on, we met and got to know quite a few people from the family of St John's. Their warmth and friendship helped us to feel more comfortable. Our faith had been given a jolt and we noticed subtle changes in our everyday living - one of us began confirmation classes.

Finally after several months and several interviews, we were granted permission to be married at St John's and our marriage took place three weeks after this decision was made; six months after the initial interview.

Our faith has continued to grow and we are now a family within the family of St John's and we thank the Lord for showing us the real meaning of being a Christian.

Ephesians 4:32 "Be kind and compassionate, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you."



THROUGH THE TUNNEL - INTO THE SUNLIGHT

About 3 years ago I decided I didn't want to live anymore, and planned to take my life. I had been unemployed for close to a year and was being treated by a doctor for depression. However, with combined alcohol abuse and medication, I went downhill fast. I was in the depth of despair, I had blocked out my family, who had been desperately trying to help me. It seemed as though I couldn't love or care for anybody ever again.

I had confided in a friend, the only person with whom I had any communication with for weeks and told him of my plan. We shared some very emotional time together discussing the situation, then he asked if I would go to church with him the following Sunday. He was not a regular churchgoer, but had been educated at a Christian school. I agreed to give it a go. When we were in church he took communion and spoke of being forgiven his sins. After the service he took me home and I started to think, perhaps there is hope out there for me. Over the next few days I often drove past St John's, many times parking outside, looking at the noticeboard. Sometime later in the week I rang the church and spoke to a clergy, telling him I wanted my sins forgiven and could I please come along to church. He encouraged me to come along and I attended a Wednesday morning service. At the end of the service I slipped out of the church without speaking to anyone. However, come Sunday morning, something was telling me to go back to St John's.

After attending for some weeks I gradually got to know some people and this gave me a great deal of encouragement. Then my father died suddenly, which came as a great loss to my family. It seemed, however, to strengthen my need to come to church and be with the people who had been so caring with me since I had been attending St John's. Shortly afterwards I took part in a Christianity Explained course. It was after the completion of this course that I gave my life to the Lord Jesus. I asked Him for forgiveness and to guide my life from there. Since I have known Jesus as my Saviour and Lord of my life, I've felt great change, knowing and trusting in Him gives me so much strength to cope with life in this world.

I feel as though I learn something new from Him everyday and know His love is with me forever. My life was saved, I believe, by God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and I pray that many more people whose lives seem to be at rock bottom, will come to know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

Jesus said: "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden light." AMEN.

Jeremiah 20:18 "Why did I ever come forth from the womb to look on trouble and sorrow?"



VICTORY OVER THE AFTERMATH

...of the Hand of Death

The appalling quiet after days of faces
As life goes on. People resume their places.
A familiar face in a crowd catches your breath
A child's cry of "Mummy!" stops the beat of breast
The well meaning friend who suggests it is Time
To get your new life into line.

...of Fire and Loss

Everything around is different and unfamiliar
As friends fill the gap with something similar
You turn to find the old well loved...
Reality hits, all is gone, nothing was saved.
The insurance cover is far off the mark Confidence is
shattered, the future is dark.

...of Divorce, Unemployment, Loss

Me! Impossible! Oh God the Pain
Both lives go on in separate vein
Tears flow on through the night.
Each new day is a dreaded sight.
Friends prove true or false.
What's the next step in life's unknown course?

No longer now the dreaded 5 o'clock key in the door
Nor trying to remember the story you heard just before
Or reaching for the old loved treasure long gone.
No! now we have the answer for going on
All these are things we held too tight
All things new, overcome, and conquered through His Light.



GOD'S HELP IN A TIME OF NEED

Part I: GOD'S HELP

When I lost my job, we were devastated. Our future which in worldly terms was so ordered, comfortable and more or less predictable was suddenly a world of unknowns.

I felt betrayed by the world and the things I had put my trust in and the only other thing left was God. It was as if all other things were pushed to one side and I was really able to look to Him with much greater clarity and with far fewer distractions.

I was really hurt and quite fragile but God was so tender and loving as expressed through the words and actions of his servants and through the message of the Scriptures and through prayer.

Being able to attend the parish prayer group and have others pray for our situation in corporate prayer was a mighty encouragement.

I guess I chose to turn to God in our time of trouble when there were no other options available. I have found, and continue to find, God.

I Corinthians 13: 4-8 "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."

Part II: NO PLACE FOR PRIDE

Following the birth of our first son, a Faith & Fellowship group asked if they could be his 'surrogate' grandparents as we have no family support in this state. They provided on a regular basis necessities such as cotton wool, nappy lotion, clothes and a poster for his room. It was a great encouragement.

God was not only supporting us financially in this, but members of God's body were standing beside us in our time of need.

"God is Love" I John 4:16, and this was love in action. This has made us realise our Christian responsibility to others in their time of need.

2 Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature, the old has gone, the new is come."

THE POWER OF PRAYER

During the decade of the 80s there were two instances where I believe I benefited from the power of prayer. The first involved me when I became seriously ill; the second when our family underwent a period of crisis.

Early in 1981 my health suddenly deteriorated and as a result I was hospitalised. It was a great shock to me as up until that time I had not suffered any major sickness. Very shortly after entering hospital I underwent major surgery resulting in the removal of my bowel and a major part of my intestine. The events prior to my surgery moved with a great deal of speed and I did not give, and could not have given, even if I had been well enough, much thought to the outcome of the surgery. Following the operation I undertook a long period of recuperation which involved three other visits to the operating theatre.

At all times during the period of illness I was aware of the support of many people, especially the parishioners from St John's. I was aware of their support through prayer

and made confident by it, in not considering any possibility other than making a full recovery, which I am thankful to the Lord that I have done.

The second instance when our family unit underwent a crisis, proved to me the power of personal prayer. During this period I prayed that the members of my family very close to me would achieve a peace of mind and happiness. Whilst in the early stages of the crisis it appeared that my prayers were not being answered in the manner that I hoped, I became aware that they were being met in a way that brought happiness to the member of my family concerned. In recognising this fact I feel that I grew not only in faith but also as a person.

Both of the above instances were examples of major events in my life during the past decade where the power of prayer was made clear to me. There were many others of a less significant nature to me that also demonstrated that power. I trust in sharing these two instances, my experiences will be of some benefit and help to others.

Zechariah 12:10 "To the people of Jerusalem I will pour out a spirit of prayer."

UNEMPLOYED

Retrenched, sacked, unemployed, call it what you will, the experience is a wrenching event. Even as a Christian I was not immune from the 'black despair', the feeling of rejection, the worry of providing for my family and of being alone in my trouble.

I suffered all these things, but with my Christian family, at home and in the wider church, the experience was easier to work through than if I had really been on my own.

As a family we certainly had to tighten our belts, and financially will be reminded of the crisis for many years. Emotionally, we had something very special to hold onto, in that time of the crisis and in the healing process afterwards.

With **CHRIST** in my life it was simply impossible to hold onto those feelings of aloneness and rejection for too long at a time. HE seemed constantly with me as did the memories of HIS suffering. HE suffered those same feelings in HIS own life. And after all I had only lost my job.

To be sure, there were some in the church who reacted as though I was a leper. Just like in the wider world, many people have their own insecurities which create a barrier in their relationships. But there were also many in the church family who could share the pain my family and I were suffering.

What we found was that we were rewarded with some wonderful and enduring friendships through this time. What we lost materially has been more than compensated for by these friendships, by increased faith and the knowledge that no matter how people treat us, we and all our activities are very special in GOD'S sight.

GOD is the only one who truly knows us, the only one who knows why we do things - good and bad - the only one from whom we can accept judgement. The friendships made or deepened at that time are with the ones who simply accept us in love.

This sense of acceptance, and our understanding of CHRIST'S suffering, made it easier to put aside pride and concern about what other people think and to get on with our lives.

Isaiah 53:11 "After a life of suffering, he will again have joy; he will know that he did not suffer in vain."

HOW I COPE WITH LOSING A CHILD

When an old person dies, there is at least some comfort to be gained from the longevity, "She lived to a good age".

But the death of a child seems untimely, unjust, a travesty of the very laws of nature. "WHY?" is the unanswerable question.

Confusion, anger, guilt, a desperate sense of loss, fear you may forget them in time, regardless of their age or the circumstances.

I felt angry and bewildered, I blamed the medical profession. I had been a most fastidious mother, everything was sterilised, special solutions were used, yet my son developed diarrhoea, while teething at eleven months. I sought help and followed the instructions to the letter, but he worsened, I will always remember the mad dash to the hospital praying desperately, though I had not prayed for years. I stood with my son as he put up a fight to live, then panic as I saw him going from me.

Because of the diarrhoea, I blamed myself and lived with guilt for over a year. We gave consent for a post mortem, but we were not informed of the result till I was placed under a child specialist during my next pregnancy. As he investigated my son's death he found the truth. RH negative blood had caused a kidney infection. I truly appreciate how cot death can be particularly difficult to come to terms with, because even post mortems cannot reveal the cause. It is inexplicable.

Though my second son, whom the doctors had recommended we have, was a gift, I lived on an emotional see saw, giving the impression of coping when inwardly I was all cracked up.

Just as each child is an individual, so every bereavement is unique. No one can tell you how to deal with it. My family, with the best of intentions, took me out of my environment, I was not allowed to return, so I did not learn how to handle my grief.

But now I can see that the iron fist of circumstance was in fact a helping hand to set me on the path to an answer.

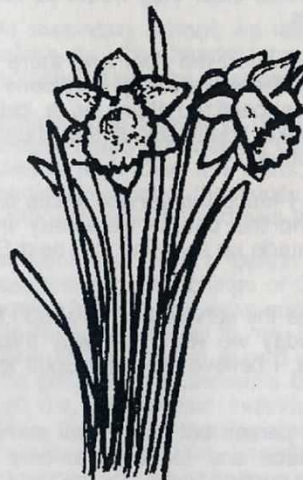
Though I received much counselling, support and friendship, and for others there are various charities who offer help, we all need to talk to someone and find someone who will really listen to us, as we come to terms with our grief ourselves. For me it was discovering God as a personal God, who knew Himself the loss of His own Son. He knew exactly how I felt and I see Him lived out, as I now share with others that I know their loss and pain.

I know how you feel, I know that you will survive, far better still God knows too!!

1 Peter 1:6 "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials."



SPRING



SNOWDROP

Pushing up thru frost and snow
Defying all as cold winds blow
Brave snowdrops, have you come
to say
That Spring is really on its way?

Your bright green shoot points up
to God
His gift of New Life to declare
And then your bell like little flower
Bows its head in silent prayer.



FINDING THE WOW! - IN THE GOD OF NOW!

In the busy secular world of today, many forget that man is more than a physical being. Man is also a spiritual being created in God's image.

At 40 years of age, I had a wonderful wife, two lovely boys and although we weren't rich, we were fairly comfortable, and yet, something was still missing in my life.

As a boy I had attended church so I was aware of the Christian faith. As a teenager, I had drifted away and although I still believed in a higher authority, I would have classed myself as an agnostic.

When the boys were born, my wife and I decided that the boys should be baptized and attend Sunday school as we had done. When they were older they would be informed enough about Christianity to make up their own minds.

In late 1988 there was a ring on the door bell. I answered the door and there was a member of St John's Church who enquired whether there were any Anglicans in the house. Although I hadn't attended St John's, I was baptized there as a child. He seemed a kindly man and I invited him in. He spoke briefly about the church and Sunday school and left with an invitation to come to church.

Next Sunday found me in church. As a non-Anglican I found the service a little different but still enjoyable. The sermon was quite good and the people were very friendly. Maybe this was what was missing in my life. Well, I made up my mind that next Sunday I would be in church again.

Something was awaking within me because each time the service had finished I felt the need to come back again. On the 3rd or 4th Sunday we were half way through a Communion Service when like a bolt out of the blue, I believe the Holy Spirit touched my soul.

Now I would not consider myself to be an emotional person but here I was standing in church with tears of pure joy running down my face and for the first time I fully understood the parable of the prodigal son, and I was coming home. Praise the Lord!

Well, the journey had begun: first Confirmation classes, a great time of learning, understanding and sharing. At Confirmation the Bishop used the example of a candle, Christ's light shining in the darkness of this world. For Jesus truly lives in every one of us so long as we hold on to our faith. Then came "Christianity Explained" classes which I found a great help to give me the assurance for the journey ahead.

Today I have joy and hope in my heart. I pray that others will also find room in their lives for God, and join us on the road ahead.

I find great joy in the family of God with my brothers and sisters at St John's and I pray that all who enter a church find the same love and joy that I did. God willing the journey continues...

Hebrews 12:11 "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, later on however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace."



FINAL AUTHORITY

I often think that there is something wrong with my testimony: it's not as dramatic as those of other people. The typical testimony goes something like this: "My father was in prison, my mother was an alcoholic, and I was a drug addict who owed my pusher \$500. Then one day I heard an evangelist, saw the light, and gave my life to Jesus. I helped my mother overcome her alcoholism, and the next day a complete stranger handed me a cheque for \$500."

Such things never happened to me. I was, of course, officially a Christian from a few months after my birth. I had a baptismal certificate to prove it! I attended the village primary school - Anglican of course! I once went to Sunday school, but decided I wasn't going to attend school six days a week.

At secondary school, we had the compulsory one lesson a week on Scripture. It was taken by the headmaster himself who, more often than not, didn't turn up: administration was more important.

After leaving school, at university and later, the church and I kept each other at arm's length. I was nominally a Christian, but with the attitude, "I'll not disturb it if it doesn't disturb me". Over the years, I questioned some of the established Church doctrines, particularly that of the Trinity. It seemed that the Church had manoeuvred itself into an untenable position and was trapped in an error of its own making.

In adult life over a period of two months, I had a born-again experience whilst examining the teachings of Christ and the doctrines of the Church. Very suddenly the scales fell from my eyes and all became clear. I actually experienced the living Christ: He revealed Himself to me. Everything about Christianity fell into place and all seemed clear, logical, and in accord with reality. I was then like a dry sponge, ready to soak up the gospel. Billy Graham's book 'Peace with God' was a great help; the church itself fed me, and certain individuals across denominations satisfied my spiritual hunger. Only then did I appreciate the difference between a nominal church-goer and a born-again Christian. I read everything I could get my hands on, attended countless meetings and workshops; separated the gold from the dross, and have walked in the way of Christ ever since. Of course, I'm still 'growing in Christ' a process that will take a lifetime. My only regret is that I didn't see the obvious much earlier in my life.

So what does this mean to me today? Firstly, it means knowledge: knowledge of God and worldly things (aims in life, appreciation of fellow man) are much clearer now. Secondly, it means that I am not alone. In my walk through life, I can count on Him who inspires me, guides me, corrects me, and saves me from myself. Thirdly, I am filled with the Holy Spirit, empowered with certain spiritual gifts to be used in God's service. This keeps me sane in an insane world. Fourthly, I am privileged to be a part of the body of Christ - the Church. The Church is not now an institution standing between me and God, but a living organism - the body of Christ temporarily here on earth. Lastly, I am an adopted son of God, who, in due course, can expect to inherit the promises of the New Testament. My life is richer as a result.

When I read the Bible now, God is communicating directly with me, revealing Himself and His will for me. How truly Jesus spoke when He said;

"Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the Kingdom of God" (John 3:3).



POST NATAL DEPRESSION

I would like to share my experience of God's grace in my life, during a time of post natal depression, and its effects on my role of being a new mother. I had post natal depression for three months which caused me to have sleepless nights. My baby is a good baby, and has slept right through from three to four weeks old, but because my hormone levels were incorrect, I could not sleep.

At first I wasn't getting any sleep at all. My doctor put me on some vitamin B tablets, which helped me to get anything up to five hours sleep. The scariest part was getting up of a morning, and crying, because I thought that something would happen to me if I didn't start to get some decent sleep. When I did start to get some sleep, I would still get up of a morning and cry on and off all day, not knowing why I was crying. I had no reason to cry or feel depressed because I had such a lovely, healthy, good baby. I just couldn't help it.

One of the hardest things to accept was having post natal depression even though I was a Christian. I could not understand what my body was going through. I thought that I was going crazy until I talked with some Christian friends who had also been through it. Our God has given these people some very special gifts to help me get through this period. It was really hard for me as I have no family living over here. My mother told me that she didn't know of anybody who had had this problem, so I didn't get much support from her. She couldn't really understand what I was going through.

Another difficulty was that I can't drive so I was house bound. Again, our caring and loving God sent some people out to see me, and to get me out of the house.

I would pray to God every night and ask Him to help me to sleep. When I still couldn't sleep, I started to wonder if there was a God. One day I was talking to a friend and she said to me "Why don't you ask God to help you cope with not sleeping, instead of asking Him to help you, and expecting Him to make you, sleep. You're simply getting upset and angry because He doesn't help you to sleep. Maybe God isn't helping you to sleep because He is testing your faith to see if you still really believe in Him."

So that night I prayed that God would help me to cope with not sleeping, and I apologized for taking my sleepless nights out on Him. Through God's magnificent help, I started sleeping properly because He knew I still believed in Him. I give praise to our Lord Jesus Christ for seeing me through this; for giving different people the ability to help me. Without God, and these people in my life, I wouldn't have been able to cope by myself. Praise the Lord!

2 Corinthians 1:8 "We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure..."

A PRAYER.....

ABRAHAM'S JOURNEY

God help us to change. To allow change in ourselves
and power to change the world. To know the need for it.

To deal with the pain of it. To undertake the journey
without understanding the destination.

AMEN