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Amaris Cole: The Bible is full of creativity. God-ordained talents and skills used in many ways for many purposes. God was creative first Himself, and then gave Adam the skills and opportunities to explore his own creativity.

idea-torial

How important do you think creativity is?



"See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and He has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every skilled craft." Exodus 35:30-33.

The Bible is full of creativity. God-ordained talents and skills used in many ways for many purposes. God was creative first Himself, and then gave Adam the skills and opportunities to explore his own creativity.

How important do you think creativity is? This edition is full of creatives – people working in various creative fields, bringing their faith to their work and exploring what their belief in Jesus looks like through a creative lens. I hope you enjoy meeting them as much as I did while putting the edition together.

Some of those creatives are to thank for the illustrations that you'll see throughout the magazine. Every single image has been carefully created for our readers, to inspire and encourage you.

We are all created creative, we argue in this edition. Our front cover might suggest otherwise, but I love that when I told my colleagues about this crazy idea for the front cover, they rolled up their sleeves and gave it a go. When was the last time you drew yourself? We spend hours doing it as children, but for many of us it will have been years since we allowed ourselves the time to do so. It's a very revealing experience. Why not try after reading this edition? All the authors who have written for this edition have also sent in self-portraits, so look out for those.

We might not all be skilled with a colouring pencil – as seen by my own attempt to draw myself – but I believe we all have creativity rooted deep inside of us, whether that's expressed through our problem-solving skills, the way we cook or how we spend our time.

I'm celebrating that through this edition, and I would love you to, also.

Amaris Cole

Editor

We're on Twitter!
Follow us @idea_mag



FIVE THINGS I DIDN'T KNOW UNTIL THIS ISSUE

My colleagues are very creative!

A Christian Zumba class called DANCE FIT is launching and I REALLY want to try it!

45 evangelical leaders from more than 20 countries met recently to discuss unity across the world's evangelical alliances

Art can be a fantastic evangelism tool

In 2003 a graffiti artist used five hours and 20 cans of spray paint to decorate an external wall at the London offices for the July/August 2003 edition of *idea*.

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The 9 – 5 of journalist Hazel Southam.

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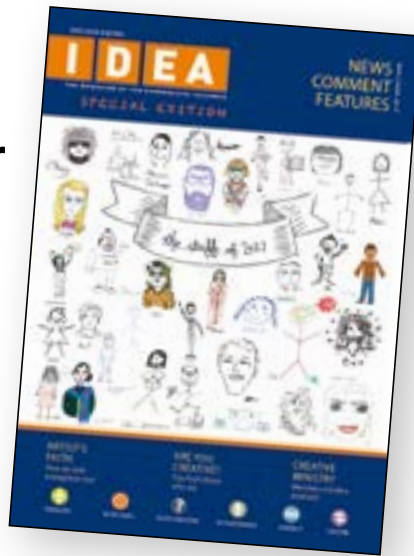
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We have been bringing the Church together

Have you thought about supporting the Evangelical Alliance or increasing your regular donation? We would love to hear from you! As a regular supporter you will receive your own copy of *idea* magazine every month and can sign up to receive regular updates on the areas of our work that interest you most: parliamentary advocacy, public leadership, evangelism or leadership. We have been bringing together the Church to make Jesus known for more than 170 years and would love you to join us. Just visit eauk.org/supportea to sign up today for as little as £3 a month.



Five prayer points



Artist copy in pencil of Albrecht Dürer's 'Praying Hands, c.1508' created by Margot Saywood, age 13 years, from Year 9 at Thames Christian School, an independent school near Clapham Junction, London and Alliance member organisation thameschristiancollege.org.uk

Praise God for the wonderful gift of creativity that He pours out on all of us. Thank God that we are a creative people.

Praise God for the new things that He is calling us to as His Church – the new, transformative ways that He is asking us to engage with society, and make Jesus known.

Please pray for the Great Commission website, which is one of the Alliance's newest and most innovative endeavours. Pray that people will be inspired and encouraged through it.

Please pray for our member organisations, including Open Doors and Third Space Ministries, as they pioneer new and innovative ways to reach people around the world for Jesus.

Please pray for Christians who are working in the creative industries throughout the UK – please pray that they would be salt and light in the often challenging environments in which they find themselves.

Join us in prayer for the media

On 28 May 2017, the Church and Media Network is calling the Christian community to come together, in prayer, on the annual Day of Prayer for the Media.

This is an opportunity for your church community, church leaders, Christians who work in and with the media, and those who are passionate about the vital role that media plays in our society to set aside time during a church service or small group to pray for the media.

Steve Cox, the chair of the network, said: "We believe that - at its very best - the media gives a voice to the voiceless and holds the powerful to account. It highlights unjust practices. It keeps people informed, while challenging our own strong opinions. And, yes, it keeps us entertained.

"Yet, in this era of fake news, post-truth and political uncertainty, never before has it been so crucial to pray for the media, and for Christians called to work in, and with, this vital part of civic life.

"We come together on this day to pray for journalists, photographers and editors. Producers, researchers, war correspondents and creative directors. Press officers and content creators. Tired, under pressure, on a deadline and in need of prayer and support."

Keep up to date by going to pray4media.co.uk

ONE: UNITY IN DIVERSITY – A PERSONAL JOURNEY

Steve Clifford, the general director of the Evangelical Alliance, has released his new book, a journey that explores the challenge and joy of unity.

In this "warts and all" exploration of his inner life, marriage, family, household, local church and ministry, Steve writes about the lessons he's learnt and the mistakes he's made.

Steve believes the issue of unity is something God is asking His Church to take seriously, and felt called to write this book.

David Hilborn, principal of St John's Nottingham and chair of the Evangelical Alliance's theology advisory group, commended the book, saying: "Steve Clifford's passion for Christian unity is evident on every page of this lucid and moving book.

"The autobiographical sections are winsome and inspiring. The theological reflections are rich and perceptive.

"Steve's exemplary leadership of the UK Evangelical Alliance is informed by a deep appreciation of the Alliance's history, and he draws illuminating lessons from that history as he charts future property for a church called to be one, that the world might believe."

If you would like to buy a copy of the book, please visit eauk.org/onebook

The Alliance in Northern Ireland marks the death of Martin McGuinness



Martin McGuinness.

Peter Lynas, Northern Ireland director of the Evangelical Alliance, commented: "We are praying for the family following the news of Martin McGuinness' death."

"He was a complex character who significantly shaped Northern Ireland as both a senior figure in the IRA and as a politician. We acknowledge that many will find today difficult given Martin McGuinness's IRA past. However, we must also remember that he came on a significant journey of peace and reconciliation.

"I met Martin on a number of occasions and he talked about his relationship with Ian Paisley, his own faith and his desire for

reconciliation. It is well known that the two prayed together and discussed faith. Martin always seems to have struggled with his own violent past, but he also took the Republican movement on a journey away from violence.

"Today I pray that Northern Ireland will continue on its journey towards peace and a thriving society. I pray for the many victims of the Troubles and their relatives. I pray for Martin's wife and family. And I pray that during this season of Lent, we will pause to reflect on Jesus' ultimate act of sacrifice that brings the opportunity of true freedom to everyone."

The Turning comes to Wales



Yinka Oyekan.

Following reports that many thousands of people are praying a prayer of commitment to Jesus on the streets of the UK, a Welsh organisation is hoping that the people of Wales will be given the same opportunity.

New Wine Cymru is partnering with Yinka Oyekan from The Gate Church, Reading, who has witnessed a remarkable openness to the gospel in recent months. Yinka's team, The Turning, will be helping to train some church groups across Wales in July before they take to the streets.

This raises hopes that a significant contribution will be made to evangelism across Wales as many will be exposed to the good news of Jesus Christ.

In memory of David Ollerton

Hundreds of mourners from across Wales have attended a thanksgiving service for one of the nation's most prominent church leaders. Baptist pastor and founder of Waleswide, David Ollerton, made a profound impact on Wales' spiritual life. A Lancastrian by birth, David learnt Welsh and became a passionate and bilingual advocate for the gospel. After pastorates in London and South Wales, David was instrumental in establishing Waleswide in 2005. In association with Evangelical Alliance Wales, this movement promotes church planting in areas of great need.



David Ollerton.

Nigel James, chair of the Waleswide working group, said: "We will miss David's friendship, his vision to see revival in Wales, and his dedication to see gospel churches planted and struggling churches revitalised. Yet we will also give thanks for his faith, for his dedication to the God-given vision of ministry that is Waleswide, and for the extraordinary energy and passion he was able to display serving that vision the length and breadth of Wales.

"Whenever David and I shared a car journey to or from a working group meeting, he would point out homes, chapels, even gravestones of many of the men of faith from Welsh history, and would then tell me a little of their story of dedication to the gospel and service for the Lord Jesus.

"David Ollerton now stands shoulder to shoulder with those men of faith and joins the list of Wales' great men of God."

Elfed Godding, national director of Evangelical Alliance Wales, reflected on David's legacy to future generations. "He was a man of immense stamina and determination, convinced that Wales' greatest need was the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

"He was a tireless champion of church planting and encouraged established churches to look beyond their own needs and support other causes. He wrote extensively on the need for new models of mission and ministry in Wales and I pray that many will now pick up his baton and tirelessly serve God's purposes as he did."

eauk.org

Stay in the loop with everything the Alliance is up to online



READ THIS

The Evangelical Alliance is sending sincere condolences to the family of Gordon Landreth, former general secretary of the Alliance, after his death in February.

Mr Landreth became general secretary in 1969, amidst significant divisions in the evangelical community.

The specific initiatives undertaken during his 13-year secretaryship mainly involved evangelism, but this was often linked to socio-political projects.

His organisational skills and ability to bring people together were put to good use as secretary to the evangelism research project that came out of the work of strategy for evangelism group, which involved bringing leaders together from evangelistic organisations.

In the winter 1982/1983 edition of *idea* magazine, Gordon was praised for being a "bridgebuilder".

The article said: "It is impossible to assess fully the enormous contribution made to the Evangelical Alliance by Gordon Landreth.

"Gordon brought to the EA outstanding ability as a wise counsellor and clear thinker. He was invited to serve on numerous committees where the evangelical voice needed to be heard. Although a loyal Anglican, Gordon goes out of his way to try to understand the different denominational backgrounds. Probably his greatest accomplishments have been in the art of bridgebuilding."



Gordon Landreth.

Gordon was also on the founding committee of the Arts Centre in 1970, which was set up by Christians working in the entertainment, arts and communications media fields, who came together to form a group to reach out to those working in the arts and entertainment world, meeting under the auspices of the Evangelical Alliance.

The article went on: "He succeeded at the EA in bringing together groups of Christian leaders, who apart from his influence might never have sat around the same conference table."

When he left the Alliance after 13 years, Mr

Landreth wrote: "I am profoundly grateful to God for the immense satisfaction that serving the EA has given and still gives. Pursuing the course of spiritual unity in action and serving the servants of God in all the evangelical churches and fellowships have been and remain causes to which I am deeply committed.

"I am very glad that as the time comes for me to move on there are signs of progress in the working together of evangelicals in this country."

Mr Landreth is survived by two daughters.

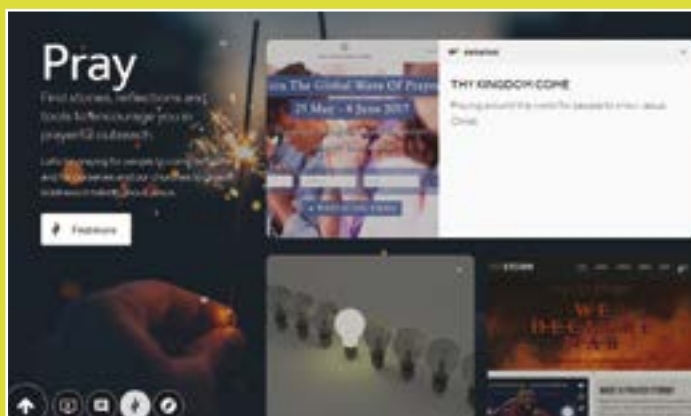
FOLLOW THIS

Our new Great Commission hub is all about inspiring and equipping us to be talking about Jesus – connecting churches and individuals to a wide range of initiatives, tools and stories.

Throughout May we'll be focusing on prayer. There'll be lots of stories and reflections to encourage you to be praying for people to come to faith, and for ourselves and our churches to grow in boldness in talking about Jesus.

Follow Great Commission on Facebook to see the latest inspiring content - facebook.com/eagreatcommission

greatcommission.co.uk



Whatever your preferred social media channel, be sure to get the latest news from the Evangelical Alliance by following us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Just type Evangelical Alliance in the search bar and join the club.



AROUND THE WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE



Illustration by Emily Downe emilydowne.co.uk

LEADERS MEET TO ADDRESS EUROPE'S CULTURAL CRISIS

A small group of evangelical leaders from across Europe met to discuss the cultural crisis sweeping the continent. The conference, held in Amsterdam at the beginning of February, was called in response to the rise of national populism in many countries, fragile economies, joblessness, terrorism, increasingly authoritarian politics, rejection of 'political correctness', and tensions with Muslim communities. The meeting was convened by the European Evangelical Alliance (EEA) and the Schuman Centre for European Studies.

Julia Doxat-Purser, the EEA's socio-political representative, said: "Many of us talk about European society being like a vase of flowers, with each bloom now cut off from its Christian roots. It now appears that the petals are falling off the flowers."

The meeting aimed to frame the problem and find ways for evangelical alliances and Christian communities, together with key Christian organisations and thinkers, to align forces to respond and offer fresh gospel hope to the continent.

The EEA reported that the consultation was lively and rich, sharing stories about what Christians and leaders are going through but also about the general mood in places like the UK, Poland, Belgium or Switzerland. Participants sought to discern God's providence and look at what this is saying about the role of God's people. The group left with a number of questions to pursue, including: where is our engagement with the other side? How do we actively recognise their needs and show vulnerability? How do we help those who are polarised to do the same?

The meeting also used an article written by the Alliance in the UK's director of advocacy, Dr Dave Landrum, as a roadmap for how Christians can respond with hope and courage to the current challenges. You can read his article on our website – eauk.org

AEA LEADERS GATHER IN TANZANIA

The Association of Evangelicals in Africa's leadership development seminar took place in Arusha, Tanzania in late February. Twelve key leaders, constituting more than 50 per cent of the *Africa Inland Church Tanzania (AICT)* leadership, were present and were led by the Archbishop of AICT, Rev Silas Kezakubi. Other participants came from the *Africa Council for Accreditation and Accountability (AfCAA)* and the AEA planning team.

Archbishop Kezakubi used his keynote address to stress the significant role of such leadership seminars in building the capacity

of church leaders in the continent. The AEA general secretary, Rev Dr Aiah Foday-Khabenje, who officially opened the seminar, said in one of his remarks that he hoped the seminar would address the critical question of whether church leaders are meeting the needs of their flock. Dr Aiah also highlighted the importance of unity in the body of Christ saying: "God is a unity of beings, the Triune God yet One and Christians also, regardless of their denominations and expressions, need to work towards Church unity if the Church wants to be the salt and light of this world."

WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE LEADERS COMMEMORATE 500TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE REFORMATION

The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) held its annual International Leaders Meeting (ILM) in early March and took the opportunity to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Held in Bad Blankenburg, Germany and looking at a theme of 'authentic leadership for challenging times', approximately 45 leaders from more than 20 countries focused on strengthening the working relationships across evangelical alliances on global and regional levels and at the grass roots level.

Bishop Efraim Tendero, secretary general of the WEA, said: "Coming to Germany in the year of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation was very meaningful for us, as it allowed us to walk in the footsteps of Martin Luther and reflect on what the reformers' message means for us today. We're especially grateful to the Evangelical Alliance in Germany for hosting us. Their generosity and hospitality has been an inspiration to us all."

The chairman of the Evangelical Alliance

in Germany, Ekkehart Vetter, illustrated the proximity of Bad Blankenburg to significant Reformation events, many of which took place within a 200km radius. The gathering heard about the opportunities the anniversary offers for the region to re-engage with the Christian faith in a time when about 85 per cent of the population don't associate themselves with any local church.

At the end of the gathering, ILM participants issued a statement reflecting on the Reformation and looking forward to new opportunities for the Church to share the gospel saying: "The message of the reformers is as relevant today as it was 500 years ago. Therefore, we commit ourselves to prayer, asking God to continue to guide us by His Holy Spirit that through the study of Scripture, we may all be brought together in finding common faith in Jesus Christ, our God and Saviour."

You can read the full statement on the WEA website: worlddea.org



by Cath Butcher

Let's get creative with words and action

The X Factor, Strictly Come Dancing, The Great British Bake Off - all demonstrate that singing, dancing and baking are things we Brits love to do when we party. They are also some of the things churches do when they are bringing communities together.



HOPE's vision is of the Church at the heart of every community, working together to make Jesus known through words and actions. During the summer months, churches of all shapes and sizes get out into their communities to serve in creative ways.

"We want a rhythm of mission throughout the Church calendar to be part of the DNA of every church," says Roy Crowne, HOPE's executive director. "Summer is a great time to get church out of the building. It doesn't need to be a massive event. Simple acts of kindness by everyone in the congregation can make a huge impact – especially if everyone is equipped to give an answer for the hope they have, with gentleness and respect. But there are lots of activities churches can do to build relationships with local people."

Since HOPE began with Hope08 thousands of churches have found that summer fun days are a great way to connect with local communities.

Lark in the Park is a community event run by local churches in Sidcup, Thanet and Woking every summer. This year's event is the 21st since Lark in the Park began creating community and investing in local lives.

The free event runs for two weeks with churches working together to serve the community. There are kids' clubs, youth activities, fun days, a creative zone, an over 60s venue, community action projects, evening events and much more, with lots of singing, dancing and eating for people of all ages. Local people are invited to have

fun together. There's also a prayer tent and a lunch time Alpha group for those ready to explore faith.

On the south coast of England, Love Patcham's festival brought together five local churches to work with community groups and local businesses for a day of music and fun for all the family. The five churches were: All Saints and Ascension C of E churches, Brighton Elim Pentecostal Church, The Patcham Methodist Church and St Thomas More Catholic Church.

More than 1,000 visitors attended the event to enjoy live bands, special speakers and guests, including Brighton and Hove Fire Brigade, RNLI, Brighton Theatre Group, Soul by the Sea, Patcham Silver Band, Brighton Dancing and Barnstormers. Visitors enjoyed food stalls, BBQ, craft stalls, bouncy castles and many other activities for all the family.

In London, Love Streatham brings together people from a range of local churches who want to share God's love for the people of Streatham. They have helped out local residents in practical ways such as gardening and painting, and have held community events like a family fun day with bouncy castles, inflatables, games, craft activities, creative arts and refreshments on a Saturday, followed by an open-air church service on the Sunday run by local churches with a choir. Everyone is invited to bring a picnic to eat after the service on Streatham Common.

Practical action also brings churches and communities together. Members of

Holland Road Baptist Church, Hove, spend a focused week each summer serving their community. Last year they spruced up a local school, clearing overgrown ground, creating a pond and replacing broken fencing.

In the north of England, Sandylands Methodist Church in Cumbria have held a successful summer holiday club with a difference. The club was for the over 60s with a range of activities during the day including table tennis, card making, flower arranging, dominoes, gentle exercise, and an introduction to computing. One of those who attended said: "Thank you so much for a wonderful taster for your activities and introduction to your church. Everybody was so welcoming and helpful. Lunch was a super treat and we have both enjoyed our time here. I think you have done a wonderful job. A lovely day."

These are just a few examples of ways churches are using their skills and resources to bless local people and build relationships. HOPE is working towards 2018 and a massive year of mission together, with churches across the spectrum of denominations signing up to say: "Were in!"

Roy says: "We'd love to hear what your church is planning for 2018. Together we can make a difference."

Sign up to receive monthly updates at hopetogether.org.uk/signup and make sure your church is part of HOPE 2018.



Emma Skerratt

Emma is a designer, letterer, illustrator and maker based in Cheltenham. She recently illustrated the *Baby Journal* by Rachel Waddilove and has worked with Alliance member Bible Society on projects like the 2017 colouring calendar. *Joanna Sopylo-Firrisa* spent 60 seconds getting to know the creative.

How do you approach each Bible verse that you illustrate?

I always try to reflect meaning of the verse through the illustration. I usually start each illustration by thinking of relating words or themes, or singling out important words. Then I make an informal mood board on the style or feel I want the illustration to have, before starting on different sketched routes. Once I've got a design that the client or I am happy with, then it gets worked up to the final piece.

In the Bible Society calendar I tried to make sure that the months and verses went well together, along with the prayer point at the bottom of the page. I would say there was an equal emphasis of the time of year and the verse that inspired the artwork.

How long does it take to work on each verse?

If the verse is particularly long, then that will take me longer to design as I've got to make sure the verse reads properly and that the emphasis and initial bit that hits you are the correct words.

Also, colour pieces always take longer than black and white because it takes a few attempts to get the balance of colour right.

How do you pick the verses for illustrations?

I'll either be reading my Bible and find one that inspires me to illustrate it, or I'll have made a list of ones that have always really stuck with me. I also like to ask family and friends what their favourites are.

What were some of their suggestions?

A lot of them loved verses from 1 John chapter 4 such as: "Perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18) – or: "We love because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19).

Preparing several different illustrations, like when you worked on the calendar for Bible Society, must be creatively draining?

Yes, especially if there is a tight deadline and I can't give myself enough of a break between each one. I tend to try work on one, then leave it for at least a day because when I come back to it I will notice things that could be made better. I also find that if I try to start too many new pieces of work in one day then my inspiration starts to wear too thin.

Do you get illustrator's blocks?

Yeah, I get them quite a lot and it's very frustrating when it happens. I feel as though some days being creative is so natural and others it's a real struggle to think of ideas. When that happens I usually try and get a change of scenery or go for a walk. There are occasions where I've pushed on through and have been able to push past the creative block, but most of the time I have to look around in new places for fresh inspiration. I also find praying helps in those situations!



Does illustrating Bible verses help you build your faith too?

A while back I set myself a challenge to draw a Bible verse a day for a year. I didn't get round to completing it sadly but I found it really helped in my faith because I was immersing myself in Bible verses daily. It's also really helpful because for each verse I've done I can visually picture it and therefore remember the verse a lot easier.

I would hope that my illustrated verses may help others in a similar way too.

You work also on non-Christian projects. What are some of the things you've worked on in past year?

I've had a lot of exciting projects, one of which was illustrating a *Baby Journal*. It was my first published book project so was really exciting for me. I've also worked on projects from greetings cards to logo designs.

Do you see any difference between Christian and non-Christian commissions?

I've been working as a full-time illustrator for the past two years and have been blessed with lots of amazing projects. I always approach them the same whether its Bible verses or other types of artwork. I always like to have personal projects on the go at the same time as client work and so have been illustrating Bible verses as part of that for the last few years.

What relationship do you see between art and the Bible?

I like to see my illustration of Bible verses as a form of worship. If I am reading my Bible and read a passage that really affects me I'll want to illustrate it. I feel like visual imagery and art can really connect with certain people and translate the message of the Bible through it in a way that really touches people.

Would you like to see more everyday Christian art around us, i.e. not stained glass in the churches but illustrations like yours?

I think that would be great, although I do think that stained glass windows are beautiful. It's always great to see Christian art done in all sorts of forms. I think it is so important to make sure the Bible is accessible to everyone and if that can be aided by using current art/illustration trends to reach people then that's such a good reason to do it.

IS HE ALIVE?

Hidden Truths About Jesus

The resurrection of Jesus is a controversial topic. We have travelled the world, exploring different cultures to examine the truth behind the question: Is He alive?

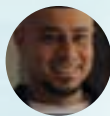
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The 9 - 5 of journal



Portrait by Jessica Harris @hessjarris

We spent the day with award-winning freelance journalist Hazel, who reports on religious affairs, international development and travel. She's written for most national newspapers and reports for Radio 4's Sunday programme. She's now released a book, *My Year With A Horse*, which tracks the adventure of overcoming her fear of horses and how that helped heal her broken heart. Because no two days are the same for a journalist, we asked Hazel about two 'average' days, one working in the UK, and another on a foreign assignment.

HOME

A few days a week I drive to Swindon and work for the Bible Society. On those days the alarm clock goes off at six – I'm getting better at six in the morning, but I'm slow at getting up. Prerequisites to be able to function are a whole pot of tea, a bit of time and Radio Four.

I feed my chickens and the cat, and have a boiled egg for breakfast. Then I hop in the car and drive an hour and a quarter to the office.

I'm a terrible chatterer – so I will chat to my colleagues and find out how everybody is. On a Monday we have a meeting and sort the week out, and then I address myself to my inbox and find out the state of play for all the stories I'm working on. I'm in a constant state of trying to organise stories. At the moment I'm trying to organise stories at a detention centre near Heathrow, Lebanon and Jordan.

I spend a lot of time ringing people to see what we can do and when – and that takes an inordinate amount of time, especially when you're trying to organise a story with a person on the other side of the world whose language you don't speak.

There are Bible Societies all over the world in more than 200 countries and regions. Each one is rooted in its country and does what it feels is appropriate and needed in that country at that time. The Bible Society where I work is one of the ones that is able to give funds to others, so part of my job is to go and find out how that money given generously by our supporters changes lives. And that looks different everywhere that you go.

The interesting thing about being a journalist always is the people you meet and their stories. I've talked to people who have become refugees from Syria and Iraq. I've met native people in the Arctic who are reindeer herders and have had the Bible translated into their language. They go about on 4x4s with one in their pocket. In China, I've seen literacy projects where anybody over 40 wouldn't have learnt to read or write, so they've got a Bible-based



Journalist Hazel Southam

literacy scheme going. That's great because it gives people access to the Bible, but it's also great because for the first time somebody might be able to sign their name. If they can sign their name, then they might be able to have a bank account, or sign for a parcel, or help their children with their homework. The variety of stories is huge.

Stopping for lunch is really hard. There used to be a culture of stopping for lunch, but we've lost that. I think we should all be Italian and have a proper sit down lunch, a laugh and then carry on.

The afternoon is often more of the same. If we're just back from a trip and I've got a lot to write then I'll be writing all day. I have to tell the stories in many ways for many different audiences. There are days when I just have my head down and am hammering away.

I get home about seven. I water my plants, and feed the hens and the cat. I'm just their staff, really. Then I have some food myself. I

love watching sport, if there's good sport on terrestrial TV I watch it, but sometimes it's nice to get away from the screens.

On days when I'm not writing for Bible Society, I'm often reporting for Radio 4's Sunday programme. It's fascinating. The stories are so varied: chaplains on Britain's waterways, church closures and recently the 30th anniversary of the sinking of the Herald of Free Enterprise. The Radio 4 crew are lovely and inspiring to work for.

I do a lot of travel and food reporting too. Soon I'll be doing a travel piece from Petra for The Observer Magazine and I'm writing a piece this week for EasyJet Traveller about how the Chilterns are a food destination now. I'd like to do more radio and TV too.

Writing a book is a discipline. 70,000 words! That's a lot. You have to just say to yourself: Right, every night I will write 1,000 words, no matter what.

On the one hand, it was like writing a

feature, in that you take the reader from the beginning to the end and tell that in the best way you can. The distance was just a lot longer.

Most of my stories are chip paper the next day, but this book is going to be there forever. I'm not quite sure that I'm reconciled to that idea yet. I was glad to write it and say what a great chap Duke was. He died before it was published, but in my heart, I'd thanked him.

My bedtime is as early as possible. One of the greatest joys for me is going to bed early, maybe half nine, and reading. I've always got a big pile of books next to the bed. At the moment I'm reading *To The Bright Edge of the World* by Eowyn Ivey.

I go to bed with a list in my head for the next day, and try to remember it when I wake up the next morning.

My Year with a Horse is out now, published by Lion Hudson.

AWAY

When I'm on assignment I'm always up at 6am. A cup of tea is mandatory. I can't start the day without it. Fortunately, you get tea the world around – it might be rubbish, but you do get it.

Then we're up and out. Always by eight, but maybe earlier – it depends how far we're travelling. I have to make sure we've got everything sorted: are we confident about the route, have we got a back up for the vehicle, have we got water in case we break down? I also have a grab bag for emergencies.

Last year, we went to Madaba in Jordan. It was surreal because I'd been there as a tourist previously. We met the local cleric who was our local intermediary. He had set up a church for refugees [from Syria]. His wife was Syrian and so he had a real heart for it. There were 200 people going to this church and 80 per cent were of Muslim extraction. What's happening there is profound.

When I'm on these trips we spend the day going into people's houses. I love nothing more than sitting with people and finding out about their lives.

In Jordan we could really only do about three big interviews a day because it was so moving. After I'd interviewed three people, nothing else would go into my brain. Everybody's story was different, but all were of terrible loss. They were people just like us, living ordinary lives, with friends, families and neighbours and then kaboom – war. Everything changes.

There's only so much of that you can do in a day.

The days on an assignment are long. When you get back, you'll be discussing the plans for the next day and going over the material that you collected that day. I was also doing radio from there, so I was uploading my audio from the hotel and every night I would

go through my shorthand notepad to make sure I could read it back to write it up when I was back in the office.

It isn't until 11pm that you are able to stop. It's so important to go back to somewhere safe and comfortable. Every trip has some emotion that comes with it and you won't know what that emotion is until you're there. There have been trips in the past where I get back and haven't been able to go into a supermarket because there's so much choice as where I've been there's goats head stew and nothing else. Or I haven't been able to walk on the grass because the grass where I've been has been full of landmines. But by reporting these things, you serve a function. That makes it easier.

You can read more about Hazel's trip to Jordan in last year's July/August 2016 edition of *idea* magazine eauk.org/idea

Could your short story be printed in *idea* magazine?

The Evangelical Alliance is launching its first short story writing competition, and it's open to everyone. Whether you've been writing for years or you haven't written creatively since you left school, we want to hear from you. We hope this edition has encouraged you to explore your creativity. Could writing be the way to do this?

We're looking for the Bible stories we all know and love to be dramatically retold in just 1,000 words.

The more creative your story is, the better. We are looking for all genres and styles. Your stories should be original, unpublished and not even a single word longer than 1,000 words (not including your title). There is no lower word limit. We are looking for exciting, dynamic, interesting and well-written parables for 21st century readers.

There are two age groups and winners will be selected from each. Not only are we welcoming entries from over-18s, but we are also opening the competition up to children and teenagers by offering an under-18 category.

The winners will have their short story published in *idea* magazine, and the over-18 winner will receive a £50 commission. Two over-18 runners-up will receive a £25 book voucher. The winner of the under-18 category will also win a children's book bundle.

To enter, email your story to idea@eauk.org on or before Sunday, 4 June 2017. Entries will be shortlisted by the Alliance's editorial team, and then the two age groups will be judged by industry professionals, including a commissioning editor from a Christian publisher.

Entry is open only to residents of the UK.



Illustration by Alison Soye @alisonsoye

What you need to know:

1. Submissions must be a short story of 1,000 words in length or less, written in English. It must be a retelling of a biblical story or parable.
2. Your story must be original and unpublished.
3. Work must be entirely your own.
4. Submissions must be accompanied by a bio including your full name, address and age if entering the under-18 category. You must state which category you are entering.
5. Please submit your short story with your name, bio, and short story title on a separate page to the story. Insert page numbers plus the name of the story as a footnote on each page. Don't write your name on your short story. Each short story will be sent anonymously to the judging panel.
6. Submissions can only be accepted via email.
7. Multiple submissions are permitted - there are no limits on the number of entries.
8. By entering the competition, you are agreeing to have your story published in both electronic and paper format. Authors will retain worldwide copyright on their work with the Evangelical Alliance having publication rights. Should your fiction win a prize or be published elsewhere, please let us know so we can remove it from the current award.
9. Closing date is (Midnight BST) 4 June 2017.
10. The longlist will be announced on the Evangelical Alliance website on 20 June 2017. The shortlist will be announced on 27 June 2017.
11. Winners will be notified via email by 4 July 2017.
12. Entrants will be judged by the Alliance judging panel. The judges' decisions are final and no individual correspondence will be entered into.
13. Entry is confirmation of your acceptance of all rules and conditions.

Faith in Seniors

– a Glorious Opportunity

A man went on a tour through all the cities, towns and villages in the country. He had made a similar trip more than 50 years ago, visiting churches, hospitals and helping people wherever he could. Just like his previous visit, he had compassion on the people he met because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

As he travelled he couldn't help but notice some big changes: there were more retired people than teenagers, a complete reversal from before; people were living much longer and healthy active retirements lasted on average almost 20 years; but he also saw that the hospitals were full of older people with nowhere to go.

On his return he said to his friends "It's like a harvest, there is so much potential, **there are lots of lonely older people** who need hope, purpose and friends and there are so **many active people who could help**. Let's pray that the Lord inspires and equips workers to go out into the harvest field".

How we manage the transition to a "majority elderly" demographic – with more people than ever before feeling lonely and needing purpose and support – will be one of the defining issues for the UK over the next fifteen years. Recent BBC reports suggest that we haven't made a great start. Statistically and scripturally this is a key area of ministry for the church and there are some signs that Christians are responding to this seismic societal shift and leading



Pray for the Harvest

because people need Christ.
Matthew 9:38

the way in **celebrating the value of older people** and caring **in community – the all-age body of Christ in action**.

That is why Pilgrims Friend Society (a Christian charity with 200 years track record of Christian Care for older people) and others like retired Christian GP Dr Jennifer Bute (founder of Gloriousopportunity.org) have come together to create conferences and resources to inspire, equip and encourage churches and individual Christians in their ministries in this area. You are welcome to our flagship conference on 13 May 2017 in Leicester – a central venue with lots of car parking, plenty of space and some great content. The harvest is plentiful and the conference is designed for those who are hearing the Lord of the harvest's call.

The Pilgrim's Friend Society Annual Conference

Faith in Seniors

Saturday 13th May 2017 10.00 am – 3.00 pm

All Nations Centre, 10 Frog Island, Leicester LE3 5AG

Key topics to include:

Bible perspectives on ageing
Christian perspectives on dementia
Dementia friendly church
Fulfilled living
Worship in residential care homes
End of Life care
Effective visiting
Outreach and evangelism and more.

PILGRIMS'
FRIEND
SOCIETY

Key speakers:

Rev'd Dr Steve Brady Principal Moorland College
Dr Jennifer Bute founder of Gloriousopportunity.org
Louise Morse leading author and commentator on issues of older age
Rev'd Roger Hitchings and more.

Book via email:
conference@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk
through our website:
www.pilgrimsfriend.org.uk
or by phone: 0300 303 1400



by Ann Clifford



Did God create us all creative?

Let's take the humble elastic band. How many ways can you think of to use it? I'm betting you will not have thought about it before: to hold a cut up apple together so it won't go brown; create a gripper to conquer stuck lids; prevent your cutting board from slipping; open a door easily by wrapping it around both handles; cushion a remote control so it doesn't scratch a table or slip off and my personal favourite – to clean a paintbrush by stretching it across a paint can to wipe excess liquid off the brush. Paint would splatter everywhere if I did that! How many of those uses have you tried?

So many people say: "I'm not creative," or: "It's not my thing." When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: love your neighbour as yourself." If living like that doesn't require a bucket-load of creativity, then I don't know what does.

God has given each of us one precious life. If we have asked Him into our lives, then we also have the Holy Spirit of God within us, to help us. We know we are all broken human beings, selfish at heart and inclined to worship anything other than God Himself. We need a creative God to help us create a life that glorifies Him.

Lives don't just happen. We make decisions all the time. Will I allow God to help me create a life that honours Him? How do I want to live? What do I want my life to embody when it finishes? Will my life be a pleasing aroma to my God when I meet Him

face to face? Challenging, creative questions that should inform all our decision-making. Our task is to create a life of obedience and worship.

Creativity involves imagination. To 'see' where God is moving and to follow Him. We then see things 'event' in our lives and in the lives of others. Prayer has to be one of the most creative expressions available to us. Prayer brings into being that which has not previously existed.

Many of us who dismiss creativity as something to do with 'paint brushes and dancing with flags' fail to recognise its power in our own lives. Things 'event' in diverse ways. My husband, reflecting on a challenging meeting, remarked that out of nowhere, he had found words for a fresh perspective. A creative Holy Spirit 'eventing' wisdom out of his mouth.

I walked with six-year-old Esther in the woods. I picked up an acorn and explained that it could grow into a huge oak. She ran to her mum and said: "Mummy, mummy, I have a tree in my hand." What things 'event' in your life? How is God creating in you and through you?

But what about Bezalel and Oholiab, I hear some of you ask? At least I hope you are asking! These two gentlemen, introduced in Exodus 31, were filled by the Spirit of God with wisdom, understanding, knowledge and all kinds of artistic skills. Why? To create a structure for God to inhabit – the Temple. Some are called and anointed to create in many and diverse ways. As a long-standing creative, my hope is always to make something beautiful for God – work the Holy Spirit will inhabit. When work is enjoyed by an audience, it allows Him to 'event' in individual lives. I remain unsatisfied, but beauty remains my aspiration. I encourage, I mentor, I stand on the side-lines and cheer, I pray.

Indulge me for a moment as my heart cries out for a fresh outpouring of God's creativity in the arts. The arts can provide a way for the "eyes of our hearts to be enlightened" as Paul prays in Ephesians 1:18.

The artist, the maker is a person committed to "a trade which can change hearts, mould minds, worry the entrenched, upset the tyrannical and nudge history," as Benedict Nightingale, the theatre critic, once said.

A trade is about becoming a skilled worker. It's about taking yourself seriously, committing to learn from others. How much time will we give God to learn our craft? 10,000 hours is the number often quoted as the minimal time needed for mastering a craft. It requires commitment, energy and courage for the long haul.

This issue of *idea* introduces a short-story competition on page 14. We need creative voices to speak into our society. Fresh parables for 21st century people. The challenge for the creative is to fashion beauty that embodies something of heaven. A creativity that acknowledges the spiritual dimension that exists, inhabited by perfect love. It will take a life-time of learning. It's

“Prayer has to be one of the most creative expressions available to us. Prayer brings into being that which has not previously existed”.





Illustration by Emily Downe. Find out more about Emily's work and watch the short animations and stop-motion clips she produces on her website emilydowne.co.uk

painful, exhilarating, energy-sapping and worship-filled. Creation cost God everything. Can we expect it to cost us less?

Ravi Zacharias said in his book *A Shattered Visage*: "The moods and indulgences of a nation have been generated by the popular writers, entertainers and musicians of the day. Those who harness the strength of the Arts, mould the soul of a nation to an extraordinary degree, affecting and changing the way people think and act to

drastic proportions."

Back to the elastic band. A humble, utilitarian and flexible creation. My final favourite use is The Diversion. Fire an elastic band across the room to hit something that will amplify the sound. Your victim swivels to the sound. A perfect moment to catch them unawares!

God made us all creative. Be inspired to rediscover His creativity in you.

Ann Clifford's creative life has involved playwriting, screenwriting, film-making, theatre directing, special needs teaching, speaking and leadership. Her book **Time To Live: A Beginner's Guide to Saying Goodbye** is published in the Autumn. She loves God, life, laughs, and people, particularly her husband (Steve) and married children. Her friends and her church are very important to her and way cheaper than therapy.



Light in the darkness

'For what we preach is Jesus Christ and we are servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory'

2 Corinthians 4:5-6

Approaching the remote airstrip, little moving dots begin to appear and gather along its banks. They're expectant villagers, drawn like magnets to welcome our plane. The Gospel is about to land.

Disembarking to a hubbub of exotic chatter, pilot and pastor unload the precious cargo: a Bible box full of God's Word in the local tongue. Hungry hands, clutching coins and notes, stretch out to receive this life-changing blessing. But these villagers don't just leave with one book. Some walk away with two, three, even ten Bibles to give to family and friends.

Light is shining in the darkness, and will spread far and wide because this plane landed.

Thanks to MAF Technology Services – an organisation responding directly to Jesus' Great Commission – Bibles have been made available in Papua New Guinea (PNG) at hugely discounted prices. And they are in high demand. 'The box you brought last week has already sold out!' says Glenda, a local teacher. 'These Bibles are changing the lives of our school kids – we

have to insist they go to bed and don't spend all night praying!'



During the last year, MAF has sold more than 1,000 Bibles in the Sepik region of PNG alone.

Spiritual hunger in the region is causing the Word of God to spread fast. The small price tag adds value and respect for the Bible and, although small, this personal sacrifice can be a huge statement for bush folk who have so little.

Another reason for this increased uptake of Bibles is because of dedicated missionaries like MAF pilot Paul Woodington. Paul is the only pilot flying in the remote Wewak

region of northern PNG where there are no proper roads and people travel regularly over severe terrain.

His job is 100% physical and 100% spiritual. Paul loves flying to save lives – 'an adventure every day', he says – performing as many as 7 medical emergency flights in a week.

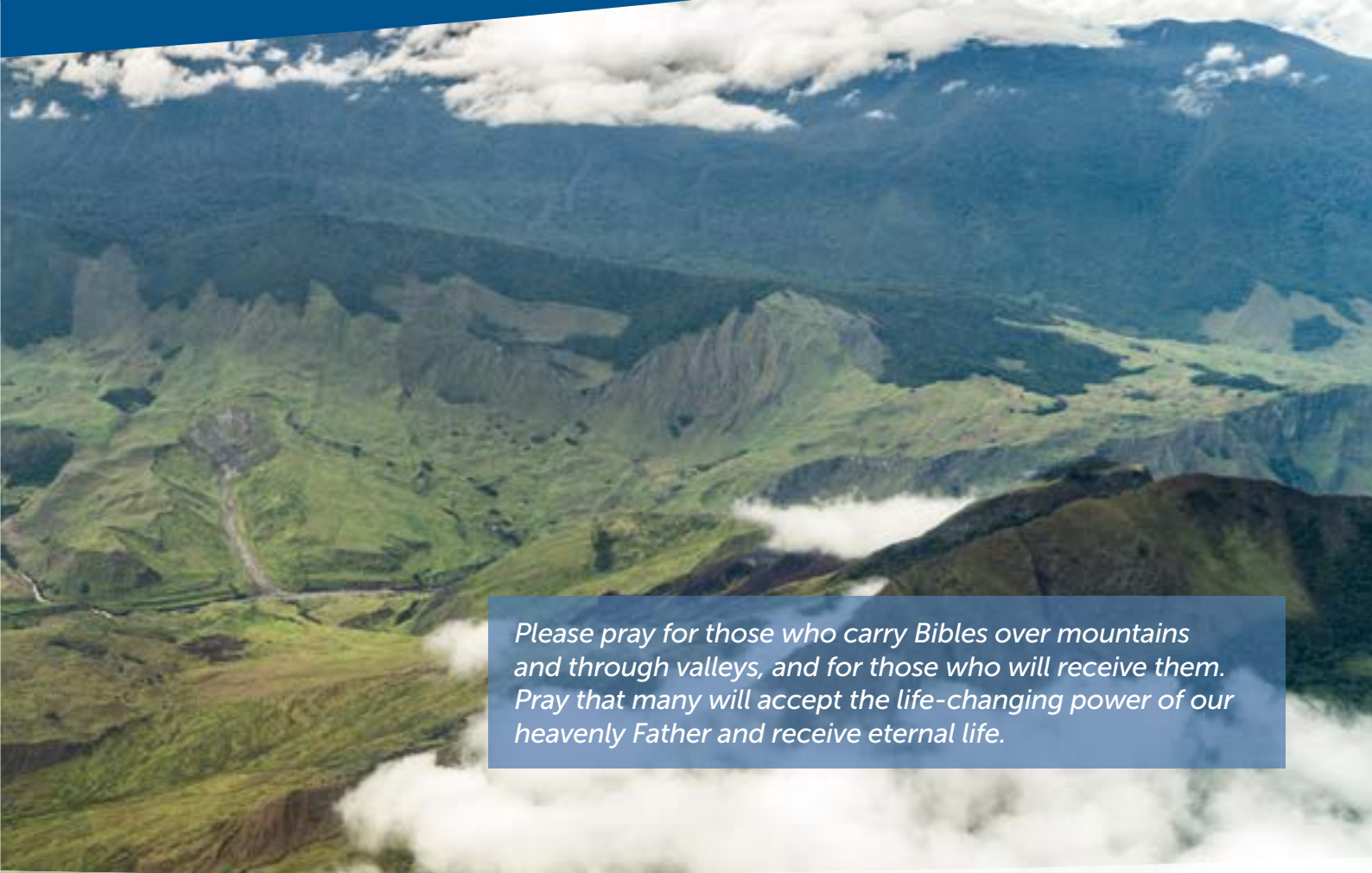
During one week, Paul flew every hour available – rescuing a man who'd been bitten by a deadly snake, another who'd suffered a heart attack and a woman with life-threatening childbirth complications. Many lives were spared thanks to his skills and God's provision through MAF.

But Paul is equally passionate about rescuing souls, knowing he's helping to build the eternal Kingdom.



Above Glenda Giles and pilots at Tekin

Right Paul and Pastor Lawrence



Please pray for those who carry Bibles over mountains and through valleys, and for those who will receive them. Pray that many will accept the life-changing power of our heavenly Father and receive eternal life.

After that hectic week of flying, Paul joined his friend Pastor Lawrence on an outreach trip into the bush.

It was the first time the *Jesus* film was being shown to a new generation of villagers at remote Wulukum and nothing was going to make Paul miss it. Papua New Guineans are traditional storytellers, and the novelty of seeing Jesus' story played on screen has a very powerful impact on their lives.

But setting up a cinema in the jungle is no easy task!



Wading for 45 minutes across a shallow river accompanied by an entourage of excited children, Paul and Lawrence worked hard to set up a projector, laptop and electricity generator in the dirt.

Above Paul sets up the *Jesus* film

Right Paul followed by a flock of children

The venue was a clearing in the bush, the seating was wet ground – but hundreds flocked to watch the life-changing story. Never before had these children seen moving images. They were captivated.

And they met Jesus!

As Pastor Lawrence explains, 'People really want to see the truth with their eyes. With pictures, the message is so powerful.' One man was so challenged by the film; he gave his life to the Lord and decided to go to Bible school.

Unhindered by fatigue, language barriers, environmental dangers or lack of electricity, Paul was determined to fulfil his calling and see the Word of God reach this farthest corner of the earth – **whatever the cost.**

'Yes, I'm a little tired,' Paul said, 'but I love it. The easy option would have been to say no to the trip after such a busy week – but it's perseverance that I get from my Father. He will not give up on these people, and I won't give up either.'

There are over 800 indigenous languages in PNG, and, each year, more remote villagers receive the

Gospel in their own tongue. Without MAF planes, missionaries like Pastor Lawrence couldn't take the Good News outside their towns. However, thanks to the incredible commitment of so many salvation is now reaching the unreachable.

But there are more far-flung places around the world where the Gospel is not being heard, and MAF wants to reach those too.

So, please join us in saving lives and rescuing souls for Jesus, whatever the cost.



Visit our website at www.maf-uk.org/light to see the many ways you can get involved with MAF



The artist's faith



Paintings by Chris Duffett

In 2014, the BBC reported on a piece of research that claimed that artists' brains were structurally different to those of non-artists. The brain scans of those who participated showed that artists had increased neural matter in areas relating to fine motor movements and visual imagery. They claimed that talent was innate, but that training and environmental upbringing also play crucial roles in their ability. What does this innate creativity mean for artists with faith?

Chris Duffett gave us an insight into his own faith.

Chris Duffett is an artist with a difference. He's a Baptist minister and founder of The Light Project, a growing network with a passion for training people in theology and evangelism. He gave up his art for 15 years, finding himself too busy with church work, but six years ago he allowed his passion for art to resurface, with inspirational results.

"'But how did you know?' he asked as I passed him the messy picture in the busy pub. He looked shocked. 'How did I know what?' I asked, and after a few minutes he managed to explain the significance of the picture. I had painted a few pictures like I usually do on a Friday morning in our local Wetherspoon's pub and this painting seemed to have spoken powerfully to this young man.

"It was a messy storm picture with a boat riding the waves. The boat had been given a name 'Peace' and on the painting, I had quickly written: 'Get in the boat!'

"I explained that it was a prayer painting and

that I believed God wanted me to encourage him with the storm picture and that God loved him and knew him. It turned out that half an hour previously one of his friends had asked him a deep question as they sipped on their beer: 'What do you want in life?' He had explained to his friend that he wanted peace in the midst of the storm. Then I turned up with the painting.

"He was so bowled over by the painting that he insisted on buying me a beer. Seeing as it was still fairly early on a Friday morning I settled for a coffee as he poured out his heart to me about all that had been happening in his life."

Chris loves using all kinds of art to share something of his faith. Some of this is commissioned and exhibited, other creative works are made and then given away to those he happens to meet in public spaces, like Weatherspoon's. "It's then I find that pictures do speak a thousand words, and many see meaning and mystery in simple paintings that I wouldn't have been able to convey in words."

He said: "I love to paint good news. Over the years I have painted hundreds of quick watercolours with ink in cafes and pubs. With each one that I give I hope that they encourage, strengthen and comfort those to whom I offer them. Many of them have open hearts and people often ask questions about my faith and, like the man with the boat painting, want to know how I would have known what to paint for them."

Chris founded The Light Project nearly 20 years ago. The charity is passionate about revealing Jesus, and "creativity coupled with good news seems to be a powerful way of doing that".

Another creative way Chris has shown God's love through the project is in Greggs Bakery. One Sunday morning he went onto the streets with 'free hugs' signs and a few volunteers. He started the morning in Greggs, asking if he could donate £50 of the charity's money to pay for people's baked goods throughout the day. The staff had never been asked this before, so had to consult the area manager before agreeing. Chris heard the women serving asking the customers: "If they would like the church to buy this for them?" A few came out to thank Chris and the other volunteers, who then explained about the "outrageously generous free gift of God's son". He said: "There really is a free gift that is undeserved and my prayer was that somehow people would connect with the message of grace through the means of hugs and the generosity of someone else picking up the tab." Simple, yet a memorable message to have taken to the streets on that Sunday morning.

"I also paint larger paintings during sung worship," Chris went on. "These are paintings that I hope will capture something that God wants to say. Recently I painted a hot air balloon and this spoke powerfully to people at a conference in lots of different ways."

While his work clearly has a huge impact on those around him, what does art do for Chris' personal faith?

"When I paint I feel God's presence in an ever-increasing fresh way. Painting nourishes me as well as brings good news in ways that words alone simply can't."

For more information on Chris and his work, visit his website chrisduffett.com To learn more about The Light Project, visit the website lightproject.org.uk

“
He had explained to his friend that he wanted peace in the midst of the storm. Then I turned up with the painting...”



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SPEAKING HOPE
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leading you from
doubt to decision to discipleship



Christian creatives

In 2003 *idea* magazine commissioned graffiti artist Dave Fenton to decorate an external wall at their London offices. The result, after five hours of work and using 20 cans of spray paint, was a beautiful multi-colour rendition of the title of the magazine that was featured on the front cover of the arts themed July/August 2003 edition of the magazine.

This wasn't the first time the Alliance has worked with Christians working in the creative arts.

In the late 1960s a small group of Christians that included performers Cliff Richard, Cindy Kent, writer and broadcaster David Winter and actor Nigel Goodwin, who felt that the Church should be connecting more effectively with people working in the creative arts came together. Their gatherings eventually became, in 1971 the Art Centre Group (ACG).

From the minutes of Alliance council meetings in the early 1970s, it's clear the Alliance was supporting and encouraging the group right from the beginning by, for example, guaranteeing to help with managing the financing of the project until the group could set up as a separate charity. The group used the Alliance's accounting services and bank accounts were set up temporarily under the auspices of the Alliance.

Finances were key as the ACG wanted to be able to have a house in the country as well as one in London where performers of all kinds as well as writers, artists and designers could come together to eat, pray and support each other.



The support the Alliance was able to give helped ACG's plan to come to fruition so that Nigel Goodwin, director of ACG, could report to the 1972 Alliance council conference: "The two houses are being used by a good mixture of people from arts. Weekends at Batailles [ACG's house in the Essex countryside] have been arranged for such groups as ballet dancers, graphic designers (a large group), and progressive pop musicians. A number

of people have come to know the Lord at both houses."

Sadly finances for ACG were challenging and by 1974 they had had to give up Batailles as it was no longer financially viable.

The Arts Centre Group is still active and today provides mentoring for newly qualified professionals as well as exhibitions, lectures and other events throughout the year.

hearing

GOD'S WORD

becoming

LIKE GOD'S SON

serving

GOD'S MISSION



KESWICK@ Portstewart

A WEEK OF WORSHIP AND THE WORD

SATURDAY 8 - FRIDAY 14 JULY 2017

FREE ENTRY / Relaxed format / 11.00am & 7.30pm daily*

SPEAKERS:

Mark Meynell, London
(First Weekend)

Robin Sydserff, Edinburgh
(Morning Bible Readings)

Jeremy McQuoid, Dundee
(Evening Meetings)

LOCATION:

1000 seater marquee,
Convention Avenue
(Just behind the Promenade)

FACILITIES:

Bookshop by 10Ofthose.com

Coffee Shop by Bob & Bert's

Crèche Room

CSSM Children's Programme

* Daily schedule varies, full details online



CREATIVITY in the Church - MORE THAN FLAGS AND FLOWERS?

Illustrations by Luke Swinney

We always love hearing from our members about the ways they're bringing the good news of Jesus to their community. From churches running Messy Church to open mic nights, the Church is reaching people in ever-diverse ways. Alexandra Davis spoke to three Alliance members to learn more about their own creative ministries.

“Christianity is all about Christians having a personal relationship with God and I think that being creative is a way that a lot of individuals feel that they can express themselves and their faith.”



STEPHANIE LAMPLOUGH, SALVATION ARMY

I'm an assistant director for music and creative arts at the Salvation Army, a role that was introduced in line with the new *Fit For Mission* structure. I oversee creative arts for the territory, from corps and outreach centre, to territorial events. As it's a new position I have found myself creating new initiatives and resources so that creative arts can be accessible to all and it has been fantastic to see how drama, dance and visual arts are already being used.

Christianity is all about Christians having a personal relationship with God and I think that being creative is a way that a lot of individuals feel that they can express themselves and their faith. When used as an act of worship it can help create an atmosphere conducive to prayer. Having grown up in a church where creative expressions of faith was not the norm, I now appreciate the freedom to express myself and my faith.

Many people take part in drama, dance and art in their everyday lives and can use them to express creativity in a way that can bridge a gap with those who don't know Jesus. Non-Christians can easily be invited to a play or concert or to take part in dance and drama groups. Drama and dance are also very public - dances to Christian music can be done in the street and people will often stop and watch.

All Christians need encouraging and social gatherings such as an art club or dance class bring people together so that they can share their faith alongside other passions.

I believe that as a Church family we can encourage more Christians to use their creativity by being open to new ideas and suggestions. It's also about thinking 'outside of the box' so that new and exciting ways of worship are on offer. The music and creative arts team are currently working on resources that are accessible for corps, including drama scripts, video tutorials and the Christian Zumba class DANCE FIT FM (Dance Fit For Mission), which launched at the beginning of March.



IAN JONES, ONE WAY UK

One Way UK has been providing training and resources to equip churches for more than 25 years in the UK, Europe and all over the world. The purpose of our ministry is to encourage and inspire others to use puppets and other creative arts to share the good news of Jesus. We have been made in the image of a creator God and we want to share the gospel of Jesus using puppets and in other creative ways including gospel illusions, drama, storytelling, ballooning and many other art forms. Our creative productions team design and build many of our puppets here in the UK.

Puppets are an incredibly powerful way to reach and connect with children from just a few months' old to children more than 100 years old! The truth is that anyone of any age or race can relate to and engage with puppets.

Our passion is to inspire others to use puppetry in sharing the gospel. Our experience has been that not only do children relate to puppets, children themselves are also great puppeteers! From the age of nine or even younger, children can express themselves using their own creativity through a puppet when they may not be confident enough to do so by standing upfront, whether in church or out in the community. As part of a Christian puppet team, not only do they witness to others, but they also live out, discover and grow in their own faith through what they do and share as a team.

As a Church, we should all be encouraging everyone to use their creativity that comes from God for the glory of God. Remember: never underestimate the power of a puppet!



SPRINGS DANCE COMPANY

Based in London and reaching out across the UK, Springs Dance Company is a professional dance company that has a Christian ethos at its heart. We perform and teach in churches, schools and theatres. We nurture and connect people and communities, and we encourage those of all ages to enjoy dance.

One of the joys of dance is that it reaches people in ways that words can't. Many people find that they can't engage with listening to talks or reading books. Our work reaches across language barriers straight to the heart of a very visual generation.

When working within the Church, we bring faith-filled dance and breathe life into scripture and worship. We help churches reach out to and engage with their local communities through performance events and workshops.

Being creative ourselves can allow full expression of self and of faith, and can encourage and develop our understanding and experience of a relationship with each other and with God. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The first story in Genesis is an act of creativity, abundance and life. As children of God, we have His life-giving Spirit within us – a Spirit of life, wholeness, joy, fullness and overflowing creativity. To be creative is to reflect the very nature of God.

Sharing both the joy and freedom of moving, as well as the discipline of creating and performing dance that communicate stories and messages, is a huge part of Springs' ethos. Step by step people have the chance to learn to sensitively explore creativity and physical expression.

Using creativity within the context of one's life and faith can manifest itself in many ways. Within dance it could be to extend personal worship through movement, to create community by teaching dance classes, to encourage children to find a physical spirituality or by using dance to communicate a message – "a visual parable" as a dance was once described.

The moments when the Church encourages this best is when each person is supported in the way they communicate and worship; and the whole self – body, mind and spirit as one is valued.



The reverend, the priest, the arts and the Reformation

When thinking about the arts, the Reformation is probably not the first thing that springs to mind. Sacred art, far from being transcendent, was another battlefield in the religious, political and cultural wars of the Reformation. My history is close to kindergarten-level, but even I recall the stories of reformers burning religious iconography and purging churches of ornate paintings and sculptures.

However, it would be wrong to think that the reformers rejected art per se, rather than the excesses and idolatry they alleged to be bound up in its forms within the Church. The following Renaissance saw the rise of more 'secular art', a shift away from religious iconography to the painting of portraits and landscapes. In Church architecture, the legacy lives on and many would even say that the minimal lines and simplicity of design famed in Denmark and Sweden – think the on-trend scandi-look – are products of the protestant inclination towards plain functional design.

So what happens when a reformed Presbyterian minister and a Catholic priest join together to form an arts festival in a place where the political and religious fall-out from the Reformation lives on most acutely? As part of a recent reconciliation project we recently interviewed Rev Steve Stockman and Father Martin Magill, co-founders of the Four Corners Festival in Belfast to ask them about peace-making and the arts.

Rev Stockman said: "Father Martin and I were at a peace-making conference a while back when Professor John Brewer suggested that those present needed to understand that the Northern Ireland Troubles were not a "religious conflict". This is, of course, true. For those 35 bloody years of conflict, the paramilitaries were not bombing and shooting over definitions of 'justification by faith' or 'transubstantiation'.

However, although the conflict on the streets was not a religious war, there was another war going on. Alongside the heat of the murders on our streets, there was the cold war between churches. There are Protestant and Catholic clergy all across Northern Ireland who didn't even get into the task of peace building.

What that cold war did was not only give credence to the political and paramilitary conflict, it meant that the people called by Jesus to be peacemakers were not doing their job. They couldn't be involved in the ministry of reconciliation that Paul wrote about in 2 Corinthians 5 or Ephesians 2.

With our caricatures, stereotypes, myths and indeed lies, we have almost de-humanised one another. It's dishonouring of the humanity that God created in His image and which, after our rebellion, He sent Jesus to die for. When we honour one another, we release God's grace into our society."

Father Martin commented: "I had arranged to meet Steve to talk about holding an Irish class in the halls of Fitzroy Presbyterian Church in South Belfast. From our very first conversation in a coffee shop in Botanic Avenue, I was aware of how my stereotypes were challenged as I listened to Steve. During the course of our friendship, I find again and again that I have had to let go of my assumptions and prejudices.

Through our involvement with the Four Corners Festival, we have taken part in events such as *Listening to Your Enemies* in east Belfast, and lived with the sadness that some chose to riot outside the meeting at the Skainos building. We have also been getting to know and love all four corners of our wonderful but wounded city of Belfast. Honour in the present means getting to know the people and parts of the city that were no go areas. Meeting with Loyalist bandsmen after the showing of the documentary *More than a Flag* has helped me in that.

In the most recent Four Corners Festival, 85 young leaders from 25 primary schools in Belfast met to share their concerns, frustrations and hopes for Belfast in the future.

Rev Stockman added: "I wish I could say that I went into my friendship with Father Martin with such good intentions. When we had that coffee that Martin mentioned, I came away feeling that something had been birthed. I knew we would do more than have another coffee, but I had no idea where we would end up. Honouring was something that happened between us, uncontrived. We took the courage to cross our corner

and find a space to share and listen. We formed a very dear friendship, and that friendship draws others from our different communities into the space where they too can honour one another with warmth, hospitality, and even friendship."

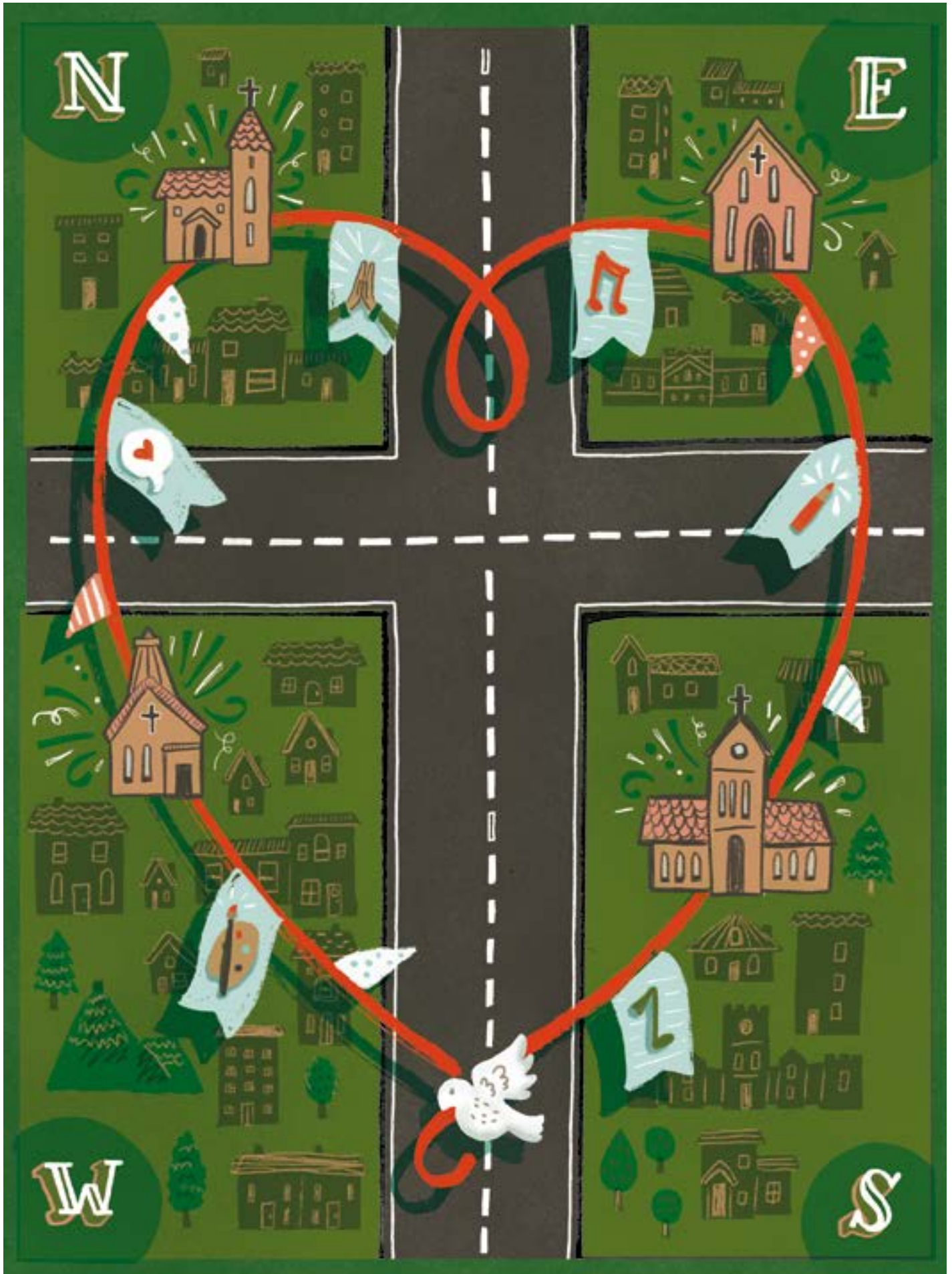
I also asked Martin how the Reformation is viewed in the Catholic community and how can art transform things.

Martin told me that many Catholics still feel a sense of loss and apprehension when it comes to the Reformation. As someone with a degree of Anabaptist bent, I can understand that while there is much to be celebrated about the Reformation, the Church has also much to learn. He would like to see more awareness among Catholics and Protestants about the existence of more recent shared understandings between the Catholic and Lutheran churches around issues like justification and salvation. This is not ecumenism, but the sharing of better understanding about the other. Martin thinks art can help with this, and added: "Art gives us opportunities to explore spaces in a different way, it can transform and transcend things."

The last Four Corners Festival featured an exhibition called 'Silent Testimonies' by world-renowned local artist Colin Davidson. This series of portraits captures people who lost relatives in the troubles. The works were displayed in a church for the festival creating what Eamon Mallie called "an almost sacred atmosphere". In response to the exhibition, someone anonymously wrote: "Art can tread where words and politics often can't. Art can powerfully capture what words fail to."

This reminded me of the heart behind the Four Corners Festival itself, to encourage people to venture into corners of the city where they once feared to tread. To encourage relationships across political and religious divides. In many small ways the friendship of a priest and a Presbyterian minister and their co-shaping of an arts festival is an act of redemption. Theological differences remain between the churches when we look at the Reformation, but common ground emerges when we look at each other as friends.

Right: *Healing the Divide* by Emma Skerratt emmaskerratt.co.uk





The creator God

“You’re a theology student; you must have a good imagination!” Of all the different comments I heard about my subject choice at university, this was one of my favourites. Of course, the atheist who said it to me didn’t mean it in a particularly positive way. But the more theology I studied, the more I saw that these words were true, just in a different sense. Rather than being the product of human creativity, our faith describes its source, and gives us its right context.

This context is the recognition of God as our creator. The first thing we learn about our God in the Bible is that He created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). He gives it form and purpose, and fills it with abundant life. And the climax of creation comes in Genesis 1:27, when God creates human beings in His image.

Genesis 1 and 2, however, speak not just of human creation, but of human creativity. In Genesis 1 it’s God who does the work of creation. Then, in Genesis 2:15, God sets human beings in the midst of His creation “to work it and take care of it”. In chapter 1 it’s God who names all things. In Genesis 2:19 this creativity is delegated, and it’s

Adam who names the animals. This is an essential aspect of creation in the image of God: the image-bearers imitate the creativity of their creator.

This is not to say that human creativity is the same as God’s creation. For example, we do not create things out of nothing, but are confined to what God has already made. But there is still a real sense in which our creativity and creative work are a way in which we imitate God and reflect His image.

This is perhaps why we see creativity connected so closely with worship in the Bible. We see this in the intricate details of the Tabernacle in Exodus, and in the spiritual gifts of creativity and skill given to Bezalel, Oholiab and the other craftsmen who build it (Exodus 31:1-11). We see the same point in the Psalms, where the most beautiful poetry and creative depictions of creation are found in the context of worshipping the creator (Psalm 8 and Psalm 104).

But some have seen worship as the death of creativity. “Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from thy breath,” wrote the poet A.C. Swinburne, for example, who saw the rise of Christianity as responsible for ending the creativity that

flourished under paganism. Similar beliefs are held by opponents of our faith today, for whom creativity is increasingly about authenticity or self-expression.

And yet this is to ignore the great creative energies unleashed by loving obedience to Christ. In this 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we should not forget the creativity of those who first translated the Bible into English, or those who preached its story and were moved by it to write the hymns we still love today.

And then there are the creative works of Christians nourished by biblical truth, from the poetry of John Donne or George Herbert to the music of Handel’s Messiah. The world of these artists is not grey and lifeless because of Christ. It’s instead Jesus Christ who inspires them – and us – in our creative work.

But even when Christ is not yet acknowledged, all human creativity and pursuit of beauty still speaks of our longing for our creator. And, however beautiful, whatever is the product of that creativity can’t satisfy in the end without the one we’re imitating. As C.S. Lewis preached in his famous sermon *The Weight of Glory*:

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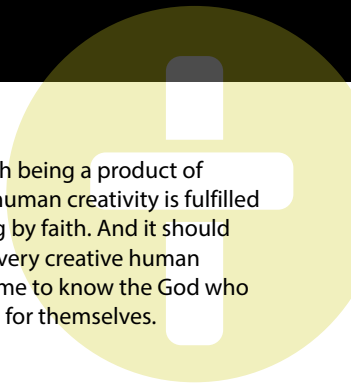
Our creativity and creative work are a way in which we imitate God and reflect His image".


Illustration by Holly Jones @illustratedbake

"The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was longing... if they are mistaken for the

thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited."


So far from our faith being a product of human creativity, human creativity is fulfilled and given meaning by faith. And it should be our prayer for every creative human being that they come to know the God who gives this meaning for themselves.






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Can I risk leaving my dream behind?

A couple of years ago I thought that I was going to be a drama teacher. I felt strongly that God was asking me to move in this direction, so I did all things you do: I tried to go back to university, tried to get on a course – and found myself instead looking at the closed doors in front of me.

I'd trained all my life for acting. I'm good, but for whatever reason, I felt like God was saying that I needed to put acting aside.

Now let's be clear, He didn't say: "Stop". He said just put it aside. I was puzzled, but began to dream about being a drama teacher. At the time this made sense. I was enjoying my time with my church youth group and I was having a blast being a mentor with the Prince's Trust.

So I was really shocked when those doors started closing. Truth be told I had run out of ideas and fight. I was tired.

Leaving the dream of becoming a drama teacher behind was one of the hardest decisions I have ever had to make. For me it was the worst thing that God could have said. I felt like I was giving up on my dream, on the life that I wanted.

I had to deal with feelings of failure and lack of success. I spent a lot of time worrying about what others would think. I prayed and the response I received was unexpected and scary: let it go.

We Christians say that this is surrender. Surrender is one of the hardest things to do, when we're talking about the thing that we want most.

But I have learned that surrender can be an act of freedom. When you let go of the outcome, you are free to pursue the thing that is right in front of you. That is the risk that allows the reward to follow.

That surrender led me to become a life coach. When I surrendered my acting career, I saw a new adventure right in front of me: a life-coaching business for actors and creative people. Now, to start a business is very scary! To say that you want to go it alone is even crazier still, but it felt right.

I got the same buzz when I was coaching as I did when I was acting. I was onto something. Now, two years down the line, I'm growing a business that combines my two loves. But what I want to say today is, if you're in a place of struggle and are wondering if you should let that thing you've been holding on to go, here are the few things that I have learned when it comes to risk and faith:

Nothing is wasted

We sometimes feel that the time we spent pursuing other careers and dreams was wasted. I would argue the opposite. In 1 Corinthians 15:58 (MSG) it says: "With all this going for us, my dear, dear friends, stand your ground. And don't hold back. Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing you do for Him is a waste of time or effort."

As a life coach, I know that the lessons I have learned as an actor are not wasted. I understand the situations and problems that they face, yet I'm able to help them move forward in a positive way. How do I know this? Because when I was starting I would have loved nothing more than some guidance and a person who understood me.

Be yourself

This is an oldie, but a goodie. Ephesians 2:10 (NIV) says: "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."



The Bible is clear that each one of us is different, so it's not helpful to compare yourself to anyone else and their journey in life. What I love about being a coach is that I can be myself, 100 per cent. When we are not operating in the truth of who we are, we will almost certainly end up hurt and confused when the 'real self' shows up.

Do something

2 Timothy 1:7 (NIV) says: "For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline."

When I can see that my clients are operating from a place of fear, I often ask them: "What is the one small step you can take to move forward?" When we think that the task in front of us is too big, break it down, bit by bit.

Do you need to send an email? Make a phone call? Write down your dream? I would say, just do something. Because really, what's the worst thing that can happen?

In my own life, I have no idea what the outcome of my choices will look like. Will I have a successful life-coaching business? I have no idea! But what I do know is that this is a massive adventure. I'm learning a lot about myself and how to start a business one small step at a time. And one step is all it takes.

We need your help to ensure the "missing generation" is no longer missing. *threads* is reaching out to the missing generation, young adults in their 20s and 30s who are leaving the Church in droves as they see faith as irrelevant, out of touch and side-lined from the very real issues they are facing.

For as little as £3 a month, you could become a supporter of *threads* and play your part in ensuring this generation is no longer missing – visit eauk.org/supportthreads or call 0207 520 3848



16 Christian creatives to keep an eye on

There is so much creativity in our churches, from the people who do the flower displays to the worship leaders and the nativity organisers. But what about those people in our pews who don't just express their creativity on a Sunday, but earn their living by working in a creative industry throughout the week. There's a whole generation of creatives in our churches who are set to be the next big thing in their spheres. Here, we round up 16 of the creatives from across the UK we think you need to watch out for.



Alison Soye.

Robert Garforth is a multidisciplinary designer specialising in video production and social media marketing. His work has been featured online in the Wall Street Journal, Financial Times, Bloomberg and Forbes.com. @robertgarforth robertgarforth.com

Rory Martin is a freelance broadcast and video journalist, based in Huntingdon. He is a passionate observer of the world, and always strives to communicate what he sees to others. @RoryTMartin

Shona MacVicar is a newcomer to the role of directing and camera operating with previous experience as a radio presenter and researcher in Scotland. @ShonaMacVicar

These Your Children is formed by songwriters Joe Baxter and Rebeka Prance, who, inspired by a range of different musical genres, weave together storytelling lyrics with a sound described as anthemic pop. theseyourchildren.com @TYCofficial

Rachel Guthrie did an art foundation course before settling into an art history degree. She began her working career as a freelance arts writer and curator, and now works with art galleries, art fairs, artists, and others in the sector, to help them promote their work through PR. @rachelguthrie8

Jessica Harris is a student artist. She has previously exhibited in The Brick Lane Gallery in London and the Hertford Art Trail.

David Hodgson-Lorente is a London filmmaker who loves filming a good sunrise, but most of all, telling a great story. davidlorente.com @davidlorente

Emma Skerratt is a designer, letterer, illustrator and maker based in Cheltenham. She recently illustrated the Baby Journal and worked on Bible Society's 2017 colouring calendar. @emmaskerratt

Konstantina Argyropoulou is a graphic designer, working for brands, charities, events, and people. Her goal is to help people make the most out of what they do through design-thinking and practice, so that an idea can reach its full potential. kdesigns.graphics



These Your Children.

Matt Miller is a London-based creative director, photographer and worship pastor at HTB. @allthingscommon allthingscommon.co

Holly Jones is a part-time cake baker and fashion illustrator and a full-time art student and Instagram addict. theillustratedbaker.com

Emily Downe is an animator and illustrator based in London. She also produces short videos. emilydowne.co.uk/

Luke Swinney – aka Reginald Swinney – is a freelance illustrator, designer and artworker, based in Barton-Upon-Humber. He produces works for companies across the globe, which includes children's educational materials, activity books and card designs. @reginaldswinney

Alison Soye is a Northern Irish freelance illustrator, who's currently living and working



Emma Skerratt.

in Edinburgh. One of her most recent projects was illustrating the entire New Testament of The Accessible Bible, a new edition published by Biblica Europe which is specifically designed to aid those with visual impairments or learning difficulties. @alisonsoye alisonsoye.com

Ruth Yimika Awobade is the founder and editor of Magnify, a magazine that explores feminism, faith and fashion. @ruthymag hellomagnify.com/

Preme James is a designer, woodworker and social entrepreneur. With a background in product and furniture design, Preme build the brand Xylo furniture, an upcycling social enterprise that takes old furniture and makes it into something beautiful. @premejames premejames.allyou.net/



Holly Jones.

How to be creative

Some of you will have been reading this magazine, thinking to yourself that while creativity is important for some people, it's not something you can get involved in. Maybe you failed your art exam at school, haven't picked up a musical instrument since recorder class or will never understand the new grown-up colouring trend. Well, we've asked three very creative people to share some of their insights into creativity – and how you can give it a go.

As a photographer, my eyes lead me in my creativity. We live in a created, creative world and there is purpose, design and craftsmanship everywhere we look. The intricacy of human skin, the contours that line a grassy valley, the segments of a tangerine, God's design is exquisite if we have open eyes to see it and be inspired by it. I think we can learn a lot from the awe, amazement and delight we can see in children's eyes – imagine if we daily practiced this attitude of surprise and wonder.

Ella Dickinson is a London-based visual storyteller and documentary photographer. She's part of the Document Britain collective and media manager for Alliance member Compassion UK @ella_dickinson



As a creative professional I spend most of my time repackaging ideas I've seen elsewhere for others to use. The most naturally creative people I know tend to be under the age of four. To be creative is to explore, and to find others who, through their own journey, offer us 'permission' to move in new directions - whether those inspirational folks be known or not, contemporary, historical or fictional. Ultimately any creative journey is all about the permission we are prepared to give ourselves.

Ian Oakley is a home-educating dad to four and managing director of Whitestone Media, a video production and media consultancy company (@whitstonemedia). He is also an experimental musician @ian_o_music



'Being creative' is not about following a prescriptive formula, or copying the creativity of others. Genesis tells how being human is being made in the image of creator God! It's not that only some people reflect God in this way - all of us have a capacity for creativity. Seek to understand how God has designed you – what makes you unique and what gets you excited. God doesn't want everyone to be an artist or musician. He wants creative dreamers and creative builders; creative communicators and creative administrators. He wants artists and scientists, idealists and pragmatists. Don't just copy. Embrace your unique creative potential.

Luke Aylen is a writer, speaker, photographer and filmmaker currently working as the creative coordinator for Spring Harvest @lukeaylen





In your words

We love hearing from you, so have your say on any of the issues raised in *idea* or make any comments about the Evangelical Alliance by emailing idea@eauk.org

UNITY IN ACTION

As someone who was converted through the Ministry of the Brethren whilst attending a Roman Catholic School, I have always felt it is terrible important for each individual Christian to know for sure what doctrine has had revealed to Him, and therefore I read your magazine with great interest from cover to cover. What an excellent production! Baggy and Natalie have got it right (*Till death do us part – just don't put the heating on!* March/April, page 24 – 25). Christian unity is not something best talk about, but best done! We had a visit from the Reading Street Pastors yesterday and were told that they have 61 Members from 41 Churches. That's my idea of Christian unity!

Norman New

HOT AND COLD

I feel for Phil Green (*Till death do us part – just don't put the heating on!* March/April, page 24 – 25), who freezes in an Arctic-like house while his wife overheats in the same room. Shortly after we got married, my husband decided I was really a lizard with cold blood, and not a human at all, while I threatened to fry eggs on his back. After a few years we got a king-sized bed with single duvets. There are two distinct benefits: no more 'bridge' between us with a howling gale; and we can increase/decrease our togs independently. Bliss!

Lesley Strutt

Somerset

AGREE TO DISAGREE

Thank you for addressing the issue of unity and in particular for the message that unity is not the same as conformity, or even uniformity, and the focus the importance of relationships.

I'm sorry to say that in the past I have experienced situations where local church leaders appeared to believe that any expression of disagreement with their views, plans or policies amounted to at the least a dangerous threat to unity, or at worst, rebellion against God-given authority. While I think it's vital to agree on the essentials of the gospel (however we define that), I don't believe that unity means we have to paper over the cracks when it comes to differences of opinion over relatively minor issues; sometimes we have to agree to disagree, while recognising our unity in Christ, maintaining an attitude of grace and respect towards one another and continuing to work together for the kingdom.

One key verse I didn't see cited in the magazine was Acts 4:32 which starts with "All the believers were one in heart and mind" – this speaks volumes to me. Unity starts with the heart and, as we see from the rest of the verse, unity of heart, attitudes and purpose leads to transformative behaviour and to effective mission. On a positive note, it has been encouraging in recent years to see growing mutual respect and cooperation between churches in my home city of Leicester - working together or complementing each other, in various areas of ministry, for example, activities to support,

HEARD IN TWEETS

gary moore @TLCdover

@EUKnews @idea_mag great article and very helpful

Rachel Phillips @RacheP2410

Looking forward to 24 hours of prayer, thanksgiving & preparation @EUKnews Board Retreat!

Christian Today @ChristianToday

Strive for unity – why the EA's Steve Clifford believes this is what God is saying to the Church: christiantoday.com/article/strive... @EUKnews

Peter Lynas @peterlynas

Off to London for annual @EUKnews board retreat - so grateful for the time, wisdom and experience they give so willingly.

UCB @UCBMedia

.@peterlynas spoke to @paulhucb this morning about the death of #martinmcguinness. Here's the @EUKnews statement.

Kevin Wren @WrenKevin

Having a great time @EUKnews event chatting with people about @SthAsianConcern, how we can encourage & support churches as they reach out

steve clifford @stevemclifford

Praying ONE will provide a contribution to the on going challenge of how we relate as family and serve our father in reaching His world

Arlene Small @arleneasmall

@stevemclifford next time I see you I'll want your autograph. I'll make sure I'm wearing a name tag!

Nigel Hemming @nigelhemming

A great piece by @peterlynas reflecting on an extraordinary week in UK: From terror to hope eauk.org/culture/friday-night-theology/from-terror-to-hope.cfm #FNT via @EUKnews

David Beattie @twintal

Is Christianity good news for animals?: bit.ly/2nVZTXt via @EUKnews

care for and reach refugees and asylum seekers with the gospel. We are seeing connections and networks being built between Christian groups and churches across the city and I believe these will act as a kind of net which will draw many towards faith in Jesus.

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Leicester

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idea is published in accordance with the Alliance's Basis of Faith, although it is impossible in every article to articulate each detail and nuance of belief held by Alliance members. Articles in *idea* may therefore express views on which there is a divergence of opinion or understanding among evangelicals.

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Living in a cloud

In late January this year, large parts of southern England were covered with thick fog. For three days, it was hard to see more than 100 metres – it was like living in a cloud. It just happened to be the time Ann and I were on our annual retreat, a week of prayer, reading, listening and planning. As I sat looking into the cloud, I began to reflect on my life – on what I can see and indeed what I can't.

As I follow Jesus, I'm convinced that his life, death and resurrection established a new ruler over all the earth. Jesus is already ruling the world. The kingdom Jesus spoke about and encouraged us to seek and pray for has already come. Yet, as I watch and read the news, engage in social media and chat with my neighbours and friends, I'm left wondering what's going on and indeed whether Jesus really is in charge. If God's kingdom has been established, it's not in all its fullness, there's still so much ground to be taken.

But, perhaps, there is more going on than I realise. Perhaps it's as if we are living in a cloud, gaining only occasional sights of God at work, hearing whispers of His kingdom coming. Perhaps the news we are exposed to from so many directions – whether BBC, Sky, Channel 4, our newspapers and social media – is not the full story. Perhaps there is so much more that isn't reported. Perhaps the news we are bombarded with day in and day out isn't the complete story, or indeed the most important story. It might not be 'fake news', but it's certainly not the 'full news'.

Eugene Peterson, best known for his translation of the Bible, *The Message*, but was also until 2006, professor of spiritual theology at Regent's College Vancouver, in his classic book, *Running with the Horses*, answers the question.

"What is God doing? He is saving; He is rescuing; He is blessing; He is providing; He is judging; He is healing; He is enlightening.

There is a spiritual war in progress, an all-out moral battle. There is evil and cruelty, unhappiness and illness. There is superstition and ignorance, brutality and pain. God is in a continuous and energetic battle against all of it. God is for life and against death. God is for love and against hate. God is for hope and against despair. God is for heaven and against hell. There is no neutral ground in the universe. Every square foot of space is contested."

As a community of faith, we see only some of these battles and little of it is reported, it's as if we are living in a cloud. However, we do sense God at work. We hear distant sounds of His activity and amazingly, as we read scripture, we are invited to make our contribution. In fact, we are commissioned to be agents of God's kingdom, His representatives in a world in which many will choose to oppose Him. We are, after all, those who have bowed the knee for King Jesus, we are those who are seeking his kingdom first and looking to welcoming others to join us in following Jesus and submitting to his rule.

So, as we live in the cloud, we need help to keep our eyes and ears alert. It's vital we refuse to accept the prevailing story that we are presented with by the powerful storytellers who surround us. Our message must be: there is another way to see the world. God is at work and one day we will see clearly because the cloud will be lifted. The apostle Paul writing to the Corinthian church left them with this instruction: "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:18).

As we watch, listen or read the news, let's ask for God's help to see the unseen and not just the seen.

“God is at work and one day we will see clearly because the cloud will be lifted.”



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