

RELECTING ON THE EXPECTATIONS we had for 2016 is a good way to prepare for our commitment to looking ahead into 2017. Any review has to take account of how some expectations were not met and therefore how some unanticipated realities are going to impact on us. In our churches we are in a season of preparing annual reports for meetings that will soon be upon us.

So the repetitive cycle continues – reflect on the past to prepare for the future. It is a sensible administrative model for organising our stewardship and use of resources. It can help us find ways of responding to unanticipated realities.

In 2016 I was fortunate in enjoying a period of study leave. It was largely spent walking my son's dog and reading about the Patriarch Jacob. He is a character who fascinates me. God had a plan for him, he interpreted that as supplanting his elder twin by taking his birth-right and his mother interpreted it by helping Jacob to trick his father Isaac into giving him the blessing intended for the first-born.

This resulted not in dignity and status, but flight. Twice God interrupted his life dramatically, first in a dream, and later in a night of wrestling. He was given the name Israel, a name which in much of the Bible is used interchangeably with Jacob. I would like to be locked in a church with Jacob (if I were ever to be asked that, as happens each week on the back page of the Church Times!) and talk to him about expectations and unanticipated realities. How would he reflect on his life?

At a conference I attended recently a participant talked about leading a group of young people on a pilgrimage. She spoke



Reflect to be prepared

about the reflection the youngsters were asked to do each day. They were to put three questions to themselves:

- What have you learnt from someone else?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- How have you encountered God or divine presence?

My intention is to use those questions as part of my daily pattern of prayerful reflection and as a way of preparing for tomorrow. Already I wonder how often the answers will meet expectations and how often they will reveal unanticipated realities. The questions are already borrowed, so you could use them too! God bless you.

Christopher

**VEN CHRISTOPHER FUTCHER
THE ARCHDEACON OF EXETER**

THE DIOCESE OF EXETER has hosted a Devon Food Forum to focus on issues of food poverty and food security around the county.

At the meeting one of the actions agreed was to contact all decision-makers, including local politicians, urging them to do more to help those who are most vulnerable in terms of hunger and poor nutrition.

At the event, attended by Foodbank representatives and other community food projects from all over the county, first-hand accounts were shared of people not being able to buy food because of benefit sanctions or because of transport costs. A growing lack of awareness and experience for some young people in preparing and cooking food was also highlighted.

The Bishop of Plymouth Nick McKinnel talked of the uncertainties facing local farmers and growers.

There are over 70 emergency food providers across the diocese and it is estimated that voluntary organisations now feed 80,000 people, including 22,000 children every year. Diocesan Director of Church and Society Martyn Goss said: "It is clear that we cannot take the food on our plates



Bishop Robert on a visit to Okehampton Foodbank

Tackling FOOD POVERTY in Devon

for granted. We should no longer just assume that we'll be able to eat what and how we wish. The future offers serious challenges to the supply and quality of our food, and at the same time thousands of us are affected by poor nutrition."

The Bishop of Exeter is among those writing to political parties on this

subject ahead of May's Devon County Council elections. He said: "Jesus says to pray: 'Give us each day our daily bread' but we can't pray that when there are people who are relying on Foodbanks to get a tin of baked beans to feed their family. It is a scandal."

*For further details visit:
exeter.anglican.org/food-justice*



pray



grow



serve with joy



Celebrating marriage

A **FORMER UNITED STATES** Navy Flight Officer who was deployed to Afghanistan before becoming a war reporter has now followed God's call to become ordained, and joined the team at St Mary Magdalene Church in Torquay.

Rev Rob Densmore was brought up in a military Christian family in America. He said: "Afghanistan was my first real experience of a war zone. It was very complicated and the illusion of fighting for a noble cause



A **THREE COURSE MEAL** was served to 42 guests as part of an event to celebrate marriage in the Little Dart Mission Community. Eight couples, all married in the team's churches last year, enjoyed the delicious meal, as well as churchwardens, vergers, organists and all who help make the weddings happen.

Vicar for the Little Dart Team Rev Adrian Wells explained: "We put the evening on to mark the marriages that we had the joy of sharing in this year. It felt important because it can sometimes seem that the church is out to make money from weddings, this was a way of offering hospitality back to

the couples to thank them for choosing the church as their venue and the importance of God in their vows."

Bishop Sarah gave the after dinner speech and said: "It was wonderful to celebrate marriage and to join with those who had been married over the last year in our churches. It is hard to know the secret of a successful marriage and marriage will not always be trouble free but in our church services we are reminded that the God of generous love is always there for us and that our family and friends have promised to support us in the years to come."

Adrian added: "It was about serving the people of Devon with joy."

From Afghanistan to Torquay

was shattered as lives were being lost for no good reason. As a Christian I had many questions that lingered and I began to think more broadly about the mission of the Church. I ended up resigning my commission."

After five months and 58 combat missions Rob sold all his belongings and moved to Kabul where he started out as a freelance journalist working for Time Magazine and others, reporting from many battle zones. He then decided to travel to London to study War and Psychiatry at King's College and whilst there met his wife Camilla. Later, while freelancing for Al Jazeera and the Associated Press, he

got more involved in church and came to the realisation that God was calling him. He said: "I realised that God had been calling me for a long time and Camilla agreed that something had to change."

The couple moved to the USA where Rob studied at Duke Divinity School. There, his programme director Rev Dr David Marshall put him in touch with a contact in the Diocese of Exeter to see about possible placements. He ended up going to the church he is serving in today, which hosts a

weekly drop-in for homeless people and addicts called The Living Room. He said: "It was mind blowing. I was able to see how the word of God connects people across boundaries."

Of the Living Room project Rob adds: "It is good old-fashioned ministry. It is not just about feeding people but also talking with them and building relationships." These relationships have so far led to 31 people being baptised and 24 joining the church in the five years the project has been running.

Queen's celebration service

A **SSISTANCE FOR CLERGY** planning ahead for church services to mark the 65th anniversary of the Queen's accession on February 6 next year is announced by the Prayer Book Society. It has produced a ready-made service sheet for Festal Evensong available to download from the society's website at pbs.org.uk/accesion and to be personalised by individual parishes.



The Queen marks another big anniversary