

CHURCH OF ENGLAND DEVON

BEING PRESENT



Bishop Robert being 'present' with people in Starbucks on a recent visit to Plymouth

DO YOU have a favourite novel? In a recent survey of the 'Top Ten' novels in the English language, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* came out top. No surprises there. But what did surprise me was the absence of any novel by Charles Dickens or George Eliot. So much for democracy.

Likes and dislikes are incredibly subjective, but one of the greatest sentences in English literature, at least in my view, is in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* when Dorothea (the heroine) says: 'If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart-beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence.' That one sentence speaks to me the wonder of life, its mystery and its supreme gift.

February isn't the jolliest of months with its leaden skies and cold winds. But the snowdrops are out, the grass is growing and the squirrels' hearts are beating as they forage for food. As a generation we yearn for new experiences. We get easily bored. But the antidote to boredom is not to rush off

after new experiences, but to recover a 'vision and feeling for all ordinary human life', and we will only achieve this if we are present to it.

One of the reasons prayer goes stale is not 'the absence of God' but the 'absence of me'. We are simply not present to God or to life itself. Our attention wanders off and we end up thinking about work or what's for supper or the problems with the car. The same thing can happen in our relationships and it can turn them sour. This month let's discipline

ourselves to be present to the world and to the people around us in all their mundane 'ordinariness'. Let's pray for grace to be less self-absorbed. Let's hear it for ordinary human life in all its messiness and fun and tragedy and tenderness. And who knows, we may discover that God is in the midst of it too.

RT REV ROBERT ATWELL
BISHOP OF EXETER

CHURCHES in our diocese have been working to support families coming to Devon as part of the government and UN programme with the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation scheme. In East Devon and at Bideford, community sponsorship projects have been launched to accommodate and resettle Syrians locally. Additionally churches have been welcoming people to Devon and especially offering practical help to the children and young people being temporarily housed at Torrington.

Martyn Goss, Director of Church and Society at the Diocese of Exeter, said: "These initiatives are wonderful signs of hospitality, generosity and solidarity, all profound Christian values, expressed by local people in response to a global challenge. They hold up beautiful symbols of hope in unpredictable and uncertain times."

Elsewhere Christians are also involved in other projects and activities, including 'About Time' and 'Open Doors International' in Plymouth, where there are already existing refugees as part of the earlier government dispersal programme. West Dartmoor churches recently donated nearly £1,000 to support the 'About Time' project.

The Diocese of Exeter has set up a page on its website to encourage and suggest

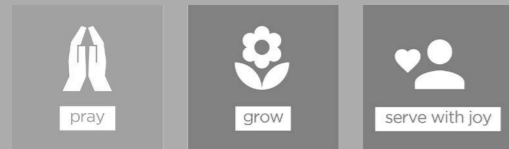


Volunteer Chris serves food at the About Time weekly lunch in Plymouth

ways that local congregations, parishes and individuals can continue to support displaced people seeking sanctuary locally, and to challenge the causes that lead to the global crisis such as environmental destruction conflict and persecution.

Visit exeter.anglican.org/resources/faith-action/refugees-in-devon to find out more.

Welcoming REFUGEES



FRIDAYS are a time of excitement as residents in the Chaucer Way estate in Plymouth anticipate the arrival of the big blue bus bringing tea and cake and the chance to chat.

Phil Baul and his wife Chris have been running the bus since it was donated to them by First Buses in 2012. The pair moved to the area in 2008 with the aim of helping the 13 churches of the old Devonport Deanery with their children and families work. After plans for a community centre fell through, the couple, who work for the Church Army, had the idea of a bus and every Friday now park up in Congreve Gardens from 10am to 2pm.

Phil said: "We have seen friendships develop and we have a growing number joining us on social outings.



Bishop Robert with Phil and Chris Baul and bus team

CATCH THE BUS

People from the bus have since joined in an Alpha course at church and young people from the Discovery College run by the YMCA also use it." He adds: "We all believe this project has been God inspired!" Bishop Robert recently travelled on the bus as part of his visit to the Plymouth area.

Meanwhile, as part of our Bishops going out and about around the

Diocese, Bishop Sarah met people in Barnstaple and visited patients and staff at the North Devon District Hospital. In January Bishop Sarah will also have visited Totnes Deanery and Bishop Nick is going to Torrington Deanery. It is part of a year of visits to communities in Devon, to listen to people's concerns and talk about the new vision for the Church in Devon.

Bishop sleeps out for YMCA

BISHOP SARAH is taking part in this year's YMCA sleep-out. The Sleep Easy event takes place on 4 March in Exeter Castle. Over the 7 years YMCA Exeter has run the event they have raised over £115,000 to support their work with young people who have experienced neglect, domestic violence or family breakdown. Bishop Sarah said: "I can't begin to imagine what it is like to be young and homeless but hope that by joining Sleep Easy 2017 I can make a small contribution to YMCA who can make a difference." *For details and to donate visit sleepeasyexeter.org.uk*



Hannah's heart for others

FOR TWENTY-ONE YEAR OLD Hannah New it was her insecurities and anxieties as a young adult that led her to want to work with other young women to assure them of God's love and acceptance. Hannah is working as part of a team at Unlimited Church in Exeter, a church established in 2012 to help young people encounter God. As part of their varied work, Hannah goes into schools to mentor young women at risk of exclusion.

She says: "Knowing the difference that God made in my life as a girl in my late teens, I can see other young people wanting to be loved and struggling with their identity and self-esteem. I'd love to see them love Jesus and be defined by Him. What I do in the

school is about choosing to see them as God sees them and not as they see themselves." Hannah counts her biggest influence growing up as her mum who is a Christian. However in her teens Hannah struggled to find a church to feel at home in and at age 18, feeling desperate, she said to God: "I need to find a church now or it will be too late!" She then explains that she found a local church that was really welcoming. She adds: "It showed me that people can't change things but God can."

After her 'A' levels Hannah spent a year in Canada on a course called Soul Edge, a leadership/adventure-sports/mission course. Following that she was at New Wine, a Christian Summer Festival for young people, and heard a call out by Unlimited's Youth Worker Pete Norris for an intern at Unlimited Church. Following interview and a last minute phone call, she decided to move to Exeter and is glad she made the decision.

She said: "I realised in Canada how important my relationship with God is and this was an opportunity to work with a church whose mission is to work with young people so I was excited! It is a brilliant community and I have had lots of support. I have no idea what is to come - all I know is that I have a heart for young women and I can't see myself working outside of the church as I can see the difference that God makes."



GO FOR GOLD.... in Fairtrade Fortnight

THIS FAIRTRADE FORTNIGHT (27 Feb - 12 March) why not celebrate by buying some Fairtrade gold for a loved one? Life for millions of gold miners is harsh. Workers are often paid very little and conditions can be dangerous. Fairtrade jeweller and activist Greg Valerio recently spoke as part of worship at Holy Ground in Exeter Cathedral. Chancellor Anna Norman Walker said: "When Greg came to us he really inspired us by his radical passion for human rights, ecological responsibility and fair trade in the jewellery sector." Resources are available to inspire clergy as they engage with couples preparing for marriage. For further details go to exeter.anglican.org/resources/faith-action/trade-justice and download the briefing document from the Fairtrade website (shortcut link: www.bit.ly/2j41Jqb)