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Community prayer events are particularly encouraged as part of Thy Kingdom Come 2019

WILL YOU JOIN THE GLOBAL WAVE OF PRAYER THIS YEAR?

Church missionaries and 'local champions' in the Diocese of Exeter have revealed this year's theme for Thy Kingdom Come in Devon: 'Fields of Gold'.

They have already begun planning the county's part in the global wave of prayer which will take place from May 30 until June 9. Churches and communities across the county are being urged to sign up to host more prayer events than ever.

For the last three years, between Ascension Day and Pentecost, millions of Christians across the world have united in prayer for others to come to faith in Christ.

The Revd Barry Dugmore, Exeter's Diocesan Mission Enabler, said: "Our vision is to build on engagement last year by inviting 'local champions' to help energise, promote and network locally with the Church of England and other denominations to encourage more prayer events in our communities (in addition to anything in churches)."



Thy Kingdom Come 2018 culminated in a special celebration at Exeter Cathedral on Pentecost Sunday evening.

"This year we will have the theme 'Fields of Gold'. Jesus speaks about the Kingdom of God being like treasure in a field; so precious that a man sold everything he had in order to gain it; or like a merchant who had seen a precious pearl who sold all he had in order to possess it.

"As followers of Jesus we have encountered and discovered this treasure or precious pearl; and are day by day appreciating just how precious a treasure our relationship

with God is."

A survey conducted after the 2018 Thy Kingdom Come showed the impact that the movement is making. A whopping 91% prayed for friends and family to come to know Jesus; 85% felt motivated to pray more often; and 42% of people felt more motivated to talk to others about Jesus.

For more information, contact the Revd Barry Dugmore on 01392 294920.

HOLY GROUND RENEWING TEAM REVEAL EXCITING TIMES AHEAD

A popular evening service at Exeter Cathedral, which appeals to many people across the Diocese for its creativity and discussions, is undergoing a transformation.

Holy Ground, which takes place on the second Sunday of the month, is an opportunity to explore, question and express Christian spirituality and values.

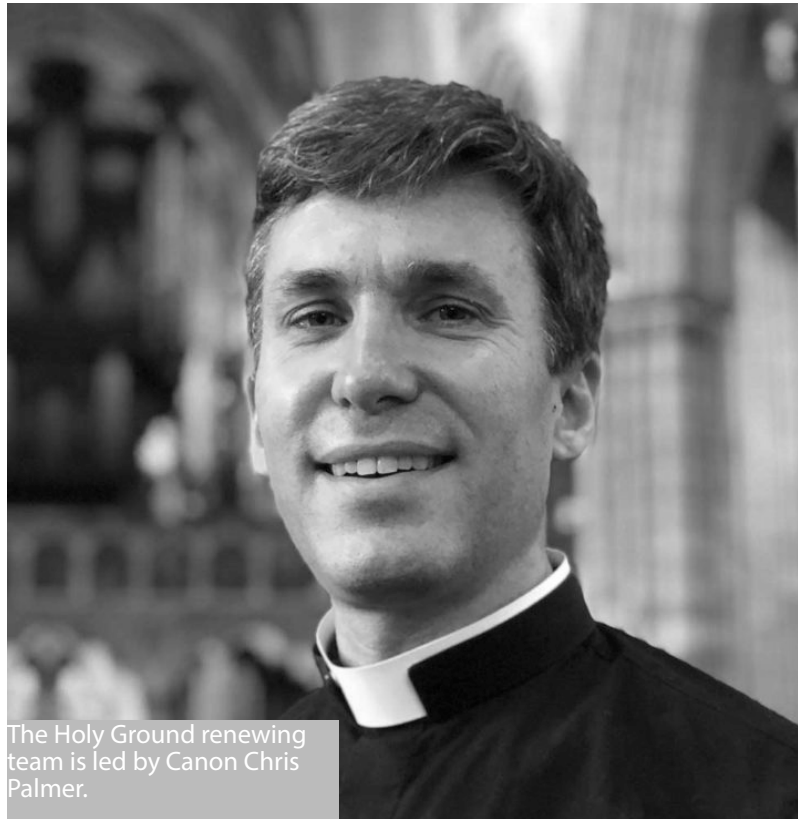
The service is about combining creative approaches to spirituality with stimulating and open-minded discussions about Christianity and its contexts. There is also space for quiet reflection.

Among many others, clergy and licensed ministers in the Diocese have found this a place where they can be nurtured and inspired.

A renewing team, led by the Canon Chancellor, Chris Palmer, is experimenting with different formats to create less of a distinction between the speaker and worship times, and to integrate these into a whole.

Canon Palmer said: "I am delighted to be working with a creative and inspirational team in offering worship and reflection that appeals to many in our Diocese. My prayer is that God's spirit will work within us and enlarge our vision both for what God is doing in our world and the part he invites us to play in it."

The March Holy Ground (on March 10 at 7pm) is particularly exciting, as it will welcome the rector of 'The Church that Changed', also known as St James and



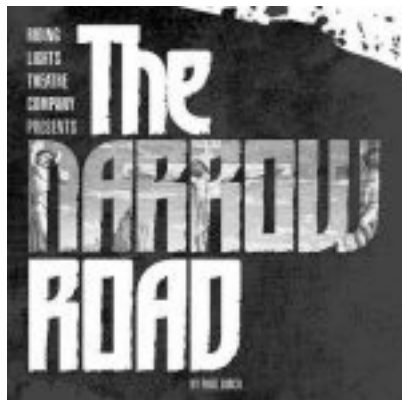
The Holy Ground renewing team is led by Canon Chris Palmer.

Emmanuel in Didsbury in the Diocese of Manchester. In 2012, this broadly evangelical church had been denounced on Twitter as a church that had contributed to the death of a gay teenager. The intervening years have been ones of self-reflection, repentance and radical change as the whole congregation has come to terms with what it means to be fully inclusive.

HOST 'THE NARROW ROAD' FOR YOUR CHURCH THIS LENT

Riding Lights Theatre Company is hitting the road this Lent with a revival of its acclaimed passion play 'The Narrow Road' – and is inviting churches in Devon to host performances.

Touring takes place from March 25 to April 20, and the company is



now taking expressions of interest from churches. The performance has a booking fee of £1,000 plus VAT, which allows individual churches to set ticket prices and keep all of the proceeds from ticket sales.

Contact Bethan Gibb-Reid on 01904 655317 or email touring@rltc.org for more information.

This month, we chat to the Rector of St Leonard's church in Exeter, the Revd Simon Austen, about his vocation, what makes him tick and why we should hold on to God's timeless message in a world which is constantly changing.

Spotlight on Simon Austen



Was your Christian faith kindled from birth by church-going parents or was it more of a Damascus road experience?

Whilst there was some church-going as a child, my faith became real gradually over a number of years as I attended summer holidays run by Scripture Union.

When did you first feel called to ordination?

As a student, I began to wonder whether I should push the door towards full-time ministry. My faith was growing but I was unsure at that stage whether I had the gifts suggested by the New Testament that were required for ordination. Gradually, over a number of years, as I began to do more speaking and talking to people about Jesus, I realised that I should think seriously about ordained ministry.

What was your previous job (if any)?

Before ordination, I taught science for a short while, studied a little more and then worked in a church as a lay assistant for a year immediately prior to going to theological college. For the last 25 years, I have been in ordained ministry, in three different dioceses and three different churches. I also served for a short while as a school chaplain.

What / who sustains you?

Spiritually, a life rooted in reading the Bible and prayer is essential, along with the joy and refreshment that comes with being part of a living church family. Alongside the discipline of reading Christian books, this is essential for my spiritual health.

When / where do you feel at your most spiritual?

My immediate answer is 'when I am at my most dependent.' I love walking in mountainous areas and am very aware of

the majesty of God when doing so, but I don't think God is any more real in particular places – it is when I recognise the magnitude of his grace and love, at my insignificance, wherever I am, I am most conscious of God's presence.

Who inspires you?

Anyone who is humble and servant-hearted.

What do you think is the most important aspect of being an ordained minister?

Godliness. I think there is great danger in ordained ministry of being made to think that somehow we are different and special. We are nothing but servants who hold on to, and hold out, the word of life.

Are there areas in the Church of England that need to be changed / adapted in the great work of growing the Kingdom in the 21st century?

God's truth never changes, even though the world around us is in constant flux. We need to be so certain of the former that we can wisely speak in to the latter. Sometimes I fear that we think God's truth changes as the world does, rather than holding on to the timeless message that changes the world.

What do you do to relax?

I love walking, painting, reading and listening to music. Not all are possible all the time, but all help me to relax.

What book/s are you currently reading?

I always read a Christian book alongside a secular book. At the moment, I am reading 'Ministry under the Microscope' by Allan Chapple and 'Sea Room' by Adam Nicholson. Both are proving to be very stimulating.



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IN OUR JOURNEY TOWARDS HOLY WEEK, LET'S STEP ASIDE AND PONDER

The Right Revd Robert Atwell
Bishop of Exeter

Unlike some contemporary painters where you need an information pack to tell you what they're painting, Craigie Aitchison's work communicates by its simplicity. I first encountered his work in Truro Cathedral, and then in a side chapel in King's College, Cambridge, for which he had been commissioned shortly before his death in 2009.

There is a child-like quality about his portrayals of the crucifixion that is profound. They tend to be a dark palette of sombre purple hills, drab olive-green foregrounds, with menacing dark blue skies and soil that is brown verging on black. His landscapes are empty and stylised. But this gives extraordinary focus to the cross and a translucent quality to the figure of Christ. All the light in his pictures comes from the Crucified One. It is as if the light of the world is dying and the world is going into mourning.

One feature that recurs in his crucifixions is the presence not of humans but of animals. In his painting in the Tate, it is not the centurion or Mary and the beloved disciple that gaze up at the face of the crucified, but a little dog. It leans forward, sniffing the air, puzzled, almost in dialogue with Christ. Little birds sit perched on the arm of the cross, watching. When asked about this, Craigie said that the creation alone had the innocence and the perception to bear witness to the magnitude of the event. The cross represented humankind's capacity for destructive selfishness which is happy to destroy truth, beauty and, ultimately, Life itself.

As we journey towards Holy Week, we need to step

aside and, with Craigie Aitchison's little dog, gaze at the cross, ponder and perhaps enter into conversation with Christ crucified. Many in their busyness pass by the cross unknowing and perhaps uncaring; but we need to attend to it for our health and our salvation. And if we do, we discover not only how all the light proceeds from the face of the Crucified One, but also how it falls across our own face, and speaks to us of the love of God.



'Calvary', which was commissioned by Liverpool Cathedral and hangs behind the altar in the Chapter House. Credit: Liverpool Cathedral.