

NEWCASTLE READER



ISSUE 25 Spring/Summer 2025

THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND
DIOCESE OF NEWCASTLE

Seeking.
Sharing.
Sending.



In this issue...

ACCA: ANGLO SAXON BISHOP SAINT:

Frances Stride offers an account of the life of a little-known saint

ALSO

Just A Sec, Comings and Goings, Encouraging The Gifts Of Others, Daniel, The Minister In Secular Employment, Children And Families, The Society Of St Jerome and Last Writes

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We are Gloria Bryant, editor of Newcastle Reader and Chair; Olwyn Black; Gwyn McKenzie; Louisa Fox, Joe Lawrie; Annie Newlands; Frances Stride (ex officio).



Gloria Bryant,
Editor and
Chair



**Joseph
Lawrie**



**Gwyn
McKenzie**



**Louisa
Fox**



**Olwyn
Black**



**Frances
Stride**

We hope you will enjoy this spring/summer edition of Newcastle Reader. The Communications Group has continued to meet via Zoom, not an ideal medium for discussion, but we seem to manage: there is never any shortage of ideas for material that might be sought for the magazine. At our December meeting, we planned the contents of this edition and, also, did some forward planning for edition 26. In addition, Louisa brought the group up to date on Readers' online presence. The good news is that we always seem to have enough material for each edition, though not always the articles we thought we would have! Our thanks go to all our contributors – without you there would be no magazine! Whatever you are

doing which you would like to tell our Readers and readers about, whenever you want to have your say about a particular issue, then please contact one of us. My email address remains: gcadman054@gmail.com

We continue to be grateful to all who make this magazine possible: for the support of Bishop Helen-Ann and our Warden Bishop Mark, for the work of our designer John Alsancak, for the assistance of staff at Church House and for the excellent work of our printer printnortheast.

Gloria Bryant, Editor

PLEASE NOTE THE INFORMATION BELOW

THE DATES OF FUTURE ANNUAL MEETINGS AND LICENSING ARE:

- 18th October 2025
- 10th October 2026
- 9th October 2027



'THE JOY OF ALL THE EARTH': A REFLECTION FROM THE WARDEN

THE RIGHT REVEREND MARK WROE IS BISHOP OF
BERWICK AND WARDEN OF READERS



I have been recently pondering the wonderful, evocative phrase in Psalm 48 where Mount Zion is described as 'the joy of all the earth'. The Psalm begins:

'Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God.

His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth...'

You can imagine pilgrims travelling to the Temple singing these words. Other verses in the psalm wax lyrical about the grand designs of the Temple structures and how fearsome a sight it would be to God's enemies. Yet I wonder about that simple phrase that describes Zion, the city of God, the very dwelling place of God, as 'the joy of all the earth'. This place is the not 'the joy of all the earth' because of architectural design or strategic defences, but because of who is there. Repeatedly the Psalm sings of it being 'the city of our God' and speaks of the nature of God's steadfast love and holy name reaching out from here to the ends of the earth.

The City of God, Mount Zion, the site of the Temple is touchdown for God's presence on earth. A location so deeply holy that still today strict Jews will not venture on to the Temple Mount for fear of accidentally standing in the very place where God touching earth: the holy of holies. The Temple is the place where God dwells and where God lives is a place of joy and joyful worship and anticipation. It is also the place of divine sacrifice and therefore of human reconciliation with God.

Today we can push this a little further. Our liturgy recognises that 'The Church is the Body of Christ, the people of God and the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit. God's presence is not just limited to a building but is discovered in and among God's own people. How would it be then if we understood ourselves, in the words of Psalm 48, to be 'the joy of all the earth'?

The American Christian pastor and writer, Tim Keller, reflecting on Psalm 48, wrote:

But after Jesus, who was the final temple and sacrifice for sin, the city of God becomes a community of the faithful both in heaven and on earth. The community of God's people is the to be "the joy of the whole earth" – an alternate human society based on love and justice rather than on power and exploitation.

To me, this feels like a vocation, a calling to live up to. You and I are called to be 'the joy of the whole earth!'

This is a vocation I want to keep holding before all of us. Partly because it feels so counter-intuitive to most people's perspective of the Church today which so often makes the headlines because of scandal, abuse and failure, and is thought to be, at best, out of touch. We can't deny these realities and challenges, and they must lead us to repentance and reconciliation. Yet these kinds of headlines often obscure the many life-giving, hope-bringing ways local churches serve their communities and witness to God's love every day.

You will know some of the hopeful, even joyful, ways the local church is at work through ordinary people in all sorts of different contexts. Take a moment (even right now!) to give thanks and pray for one good way the Church is working, without rushing to think about all the things that are going wrong or falling apart.

How might it be if you and I as ministers and teachers of the Word, chose to meditate more on joy, and to proclaim a common vocation to joy. A vocation to be what Tim Keller calls 'an alternate human society based on love and justice rather than on power and exploitation.'

A vocation to joy is not self-made or sentimental, it's not summoned up by our own will-power and reliant on our own feelings or emotions. A vocation to joy arises from God's reconciling, life-giving love within us overflowing through us to a challenged and challenging world. Most of all, it arises from each of us recognising our shared reality and responsibility as the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit and so 'the joy of all the earth!'

JUST A SEC

FRANCES STRIDE IS A READER AT HEXHAM ABBEY
AND SECRETARY TO THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF
THE READERS' BOARD



As your Honorary Secretary, I am very encouraged by the number of Readers and Readers with PTO who returned their completed Annual Return Forms for 2024.

Out of a total of ninety-one forms sent out, eighty-six were signed and submitted. This is a great result. The information given about our ministry as Readers will help to inform the work being undertaken by your Readers Board Executive Committee (RBEC) to support you.

The Annual Return Forms reveal the many joys and successes of being a Reader, and also the wide range of ministry and work we undertake. But it is also clear that there are many varied and wide-ranging issues we are struggling to accommodate in our vocation as Readers. Concerns have been raised about relationships, the lack of parish officers, the impact of bereavement and health issues, parishes being in vacancy - especially long term, access to Safeguarding training, and work pressures. Isolation, lack of opportunities for fellowship with other Readers, and feelings of Reader ministry being undervalued were also well documented issues.

Bishop Mark, along with Revd Stephen Tranter (DDOV), are reviewing and reflecting on all these areas of concern, and although it will take time, changes are already being discussed and how these can be implemented. As I am writing this article, the RBEC is preparing for our next quarterly meeting which will decide on a new policy for the Three-Year Reviews, and their outcomes.

“**May I wish you all the continued blessings of Easter over summer, filled with faith, hope and the promise of new beginnings.**”



Finger Labyrinth, St Wilfrid's Chapel, Hexham Abbey, Photo © 2025 Phil Hughes

A Better Resurrection

by Christina G. Rossetti

I have no wit, no words, no tears;
My heart within me like a stone
Is numbed too much for hopes or fears;
Look right, look left, I dwell alone;
I lift mine eyes, but dimmed with grief
No everlasting hills I see;
My life is in the falling leaf:
O Jesus, quicken me!

My life is like a faded leaf,
My harvest dwindled to a husk;
Truly my life is void and brief
And tedious in the barren dusk;
My life is like a frozen thing,
No bud nor greenness can I see:
Yet rise it shall, - the sap of Spring;
O Jesus, rise in me!

My life is like a broken bowl,
A broken bowl that cannot hold
One drop of water for my soul
Or cordial in the searching cold;
Cast in the fire the perished thing,
Melt and remould it, till it be
A royal cup for Him my King:
O Jesus, drink of me!

Poems by Christina G Rossetti, Devotional Pieces,
Page 83, BOSTON: LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY, 1906.

COMINGS AND GOINGS.

With sadness, we record the deaths of two Readers



ALFRED GROOME, 1930-2025: a tribute from his daughter Cate Groome Mackay

My father was born on 11th November 1930 in Ellesmere Port in Cheshire where his father was a Methodist preacher. He grew up in pre and post war times. His parents were older parents, who worked hard to make ends meet. He grew up surrounded by family and in a close community. This is where his deep understanding of people and the importance of community came from. My mother was from the North East and so they ended up moving around from East Boldon to Throckley until they ended up in Warkworth, where my father became Chief Executive of Alnwick District Council. This post saw Dad in a job he loved and a place he considered home. He often reminisced, even recently, how lucky he had been that local government reorganisation had led him there.

His job was time consuming and all-encompassing; however, he was encouraged by the vicar at St Lawrence's church in Warkworth, to consider lay ministry. He loved the camaraderie and friendship of the Readers and mentors he encountered, and he hosted many gatherings at his home with my mother providing the refreshments. He enjoyed their theological discussions and the academic nature of his studies. It also gave him the opportunity to share his faith with others. Once my father was licensed as a Reader, he continued to serve the community, including neighbouring churches such as Acklington, Shilbottle and Felton, to name but a few, as well as Warkworth, for many years. He loved every aspect of his ministry but he particularly loved sung evensong, either taking it or attending.

He believed the church was about serving, that the church existed for everyone. He believed in the importance of action as well as discussion and prayer. He wrote in one of his sermons: "I believe that it's the deed that counts. If we do more church worshipping than caring then the balance is wrong because caring is constructive worship.....some sayings are indelibly etched on the memory and one we heard years ago in this pulpit haunts me constantly; it was that the Church of England is a unique institution; it exists more for those who don't belong to it than those who do." However, most of all he loved people and he believed in a welcome for everyone.

My mother was also the Sunday school teacher and their involvement in the life of the church was extremely fulfilling for them both. He saw many vicars come and go at Warkworth, with many becoming friends. Being a lay minister was one of the proudest achievements of his life and, when he was no longer able to practice, he was honoured to become a Reader Emeritus. Towards the end of his life, he enjoyed services at the local URC churches in Warkworth and Alnwick and weekly church services within Abbeyfield care home. His faith was still so important and someone remarked to me that his face would light up when he entered the church.

My father died on 22nd January 2025. He was 94. He had lived a wonderful life and touched the lives of others through his work and his ministry. A man of deep faith and a believer in not just the holy spirit but the power of the human spirit too.



SIMON EMBLETON, 1967-2025: A tribute from Anne Morris, his fellow Reader at St John's Church Whorlton

Simon Embleton, 57, a much loved and respected Reader at St John's Church Whorlton, Westerhope, Newcastle, died suddenly at home on 12th February 2025. He was the beloved son of Mary and Ed, the devoted brother of Ian, brother-in-law to Clare and much-loved uncle to Katy.

Simon was born on 8th March 1967 in Westerhope; his life was marked by his unwavering dedication to a Christian life and to his Church. Simon played a crucial role in nurturing young people and has been quoted as being 'the backbone of youth activities for many years, from driving the minibus to washing up the dishes.' (Jonathan Tait).

I had the honour of working alongside Simon in our Church, he was always a strong presence and support to me during our ministry together

and during our time as Churchwardens. We trained as Readers at Lindisfarne College of Theology, meeting lots of inspirational people and making lifelong friends who shared in our experiences and learning.

Simon was known for his patience, wisdom and kindness to all who knew him. He had a profound sense of humour and a love for all things relating to Laurel and Hardy and he would often take himself off to events around the country. His love of music ranged from Handel's 'Messiah' to Madness. Simon also had developed a love of Golf in more recent years and when the opportunity arose, he embarked on golfing holidays abroad for relaxation.

He will be greatly missed by his family, friends and church family.

MAY ALFRED AND SIMON REST IN PEACE AND RISE IN GLORY

"ENCOURAGING THE GIFTS OF OTHERS" – WHAT ARE WE TAKING FROM THE YEAR OF SEEKING INTO THE YEAR OF SHARING?



REVD RIC WHAITE IS THE DIRECTOR OF MISSION AND MINISTRY IN THE DIOCESE OF NEWCASTLE.

One of the orientating principles during the first year of the three-year journey we are taking as a Diocese, entitled "Seeking Sharing Sending", has been undertaking seeking as a way of discerning together.

This is more than looking for a certain kind of activity, some potential opportunities or an identifiable set of outcomes in our lives or in the world around us. The introduction to the service that admits and licenses Readers across the Church of England helps clarify this. Our discernment has been of a kind that looks for signs, possibilities, hopes. As the licensing service has it, our diocese has sought to "encourage the ministries" of God's people. Or to put it another way, to explore all those various ways in which we might notice God with us and with others as well as alongside us in our churches and our communities. Our discernment has been an attempt to pay attention to the various signs and different ways we notice God with us and with others.

Our Scriptures remind us that the God who calls us does not do so through normal or ideal circumstances. Think of the eight blessings Jesus underlines in the Sermon on the Mount at the beginning of Matthew 5. Those people and circumstances named in that part of Jesus' teaching are not uniformly situated in places of health, wealth and happiness by the standards of the world. I wonder whether this teaching, or in the other witnesses familiar to us from the scriptures, is aimed not at confusing readers and hearers but of reminding all that God draws near to all kinds of people, including and especially those

who find themselves in vulnerable, unpromising or even tragic circumstances. It serves to remind us that across the testimony of the scriptures God's work isn't the result of a particular combination of human behaviours or activities. If this were the case, then one conclusion could be that mission and ministry today would be a matter of our making more effort and discerning ways to sacrifice more time and energy. Sometimes, faced with scarcity and driven by anxious comparisons with other Christians, other churches or just the ways of the world, we do feel drawn into this way of living together. Yet we are reminded in some of the earliest Christian writing (the Acts of the Apostles) that even the profoundly significant experience of Pentecost wasn't prefaced by a heroic heightening of human activity. In Acts 1 the scene is very different: testimony and witness to the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus but also indications of fear about what was next. The discerning activity of those early followers of Jesus included remaining in prayer somewhat concealed from the world that must've seemed so inhospitable. The priority was focussing not on their own perceived fragility but on the God who the scriptures reminded them maintained steadfast love with God's people, including in times of isolation and alienation.

The outpouring that follows at Pentecost is a reminder of the unexpected ways God appears with us and (as Pentecost has it) within us. It is not the result of a calculated set of activities but is participated in by prayerfully attending to how and where God is with each of us. By encouraging all God's people to prayerfully attend to God's ways with the world we echo the sense of the liturgy for the licensing of readers which has us focus on encouraging the gifts of all gods

people. As we continue to journey from "Seeking" towards "Sharing" this can also be a reminder that to encourage can mean to seek and discern the different ways in which God is with different people including and especially those who do not imagine themselves to be especially "churchy" or faithful or called.

The encouragement offered by Readers to clergy and laity alike is an emphasis on God being with us in our rootedness, in our localities and particular places. Bishop Helen-Ann sometimes reflects on Christianity as a place-making faith, where our faith enables and encourages us to notice where as well as how God is with us. This kind of vocation is one we share because of our baptism. As I said in a number of other places during my first year serving in the diocese, our common cause during a year of seeking, a year of discernment, is to prayerfully discern: to attend (to notice), to articulate (expressing what we've noticed), and then to amplify (joyfully sharing how God has been with us and others). Those licensed for Reader ministry in our diocese offer a particular perspective as many of you serve in the places you also call home. You have discerned and attended to God's call in your own places and followed faithfully in God's leading you back to help others witness more faithfully in those places.

Of particular value in this task are those faithful reminders that the faith we share is not a story that begins and ends with us, and certainly is not centred solely around our experience. Even for those of us with lifelong attachments to particular places and places of worship our faith invites us to encourage one another to locate ourselves in that longer story of how and where and when God has been with God's people. This can include those times and seasons in which God is with us during profound upheaval and change. We are all joining not starting a story. When we are encouraging one another to focus on God's work amongst us we are all contributing to moving the plot of our shared Christian story forward helping cultivate faithful imaginations in which many stories fit. We are all joining a conversation that is already on the way, a celebration already in full swing, our primary responsibility is to attend to the source of the joy and celebration and look for our own ways to faithfully amplify it.

The landscape in which our vision of encouraging discernment - Seeking and Sharing - is a challenging one. There is a commonplace emphasis, both inside and beyond our churches, that we do not have enough of the things that we imagine we need. We could all identify places where it might be advantageous to have more

God draws near to all kinds of people, including those who find themselves in vulnerable, unpromising or even tragic circumstances.

money to spend or share, more time to offer, or more people to support the different initiatives our churches, chaplaincies, and worshipping communities are engaged in. Sometimes this scarcity impacts the way we enter into the fellowship we share with other Christians whose circumstances seem different from our own. We compare and contrast our context with others and notice not where God is working but where we seem to lack what other others have more of. The comparison leaves us anxious that we don't HAVE enough or that, somehow, WE are not enough.

Whilst this is going on, we sometimes miss one consequence: that our anxiety has caused us to focus more and more attention on what we do or do not have, and less attention on the God whose grace at work amongst us is at the centre of our faith. In so doing, we also miss those stories, miss those lives witnessing to a God who is working with people in deeply unpromising circumstances (at least by the world's standards). The scriptures we share offers a plurality of stories of how God is found with God's people; so too the lives we lead as well as the lives of those we live alongside. We discern and encourage these different stories, somewhat paradoxically, by attending to the constant presence of God and those moments where we and others (whether others in the Bible or others in our own times) manage to articulate, to share, to witness about the mysterious and gracious ways of God.

DANIEL THE MINISTER IN SECULAR EMPLOYMENT

REVD ROB FOX IS A RETIRED MSE (MINISTER IN SECULAR EMPLOYMENT).

Rob worked in tax for over 30 years. He worships at St Mary Magdalene Longbenton. He has written study materials for Tax Justice Sunday which is marked on 8th of June. These can be accessed at justmoney.org.uk/tax-justice-sunday



While Daniel was a man of faith he had no formal role within the religion of his people, the Jews in exile. He was a civil servant and became a very senior one at that. What then makes him a Minister in Secular Employment, rather than simply a faithful Jew? The Kings he served, and the enemies he acquired, saw him as representing the God of Israel and acknowledged him as doing so (see chapters 4 and 6 in particular).

We know the story. Judah is target of a hostile takeover bid by Babylon. The large army camping outside Jerusalem was a bit of a giveaway. Jerusalem falls, and Judah absorbed into Babylon's empire. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, "recruits" talent from Judah into his own service, "young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace" (ch.1:4). These including Daniel, were put through a three-year training course, including the language they are to work in. Daniel ("God is my judge") is successively promoted until he is the King's right-hand man, the Managing Director to the King's Chairman. He is very good at his job, showing wisdom, foresight, integrity and is, unusually, incorruptible. He sees faithful service to the king as part of his faithful service to God. So, when the king introduces dietary rules that cut across his service to God, Daniel proposes a practical solution, not an occasion for conflict and standing on principles. He respects the king's right to rule and works in that service, because it is also his service to God. He lives and works knowing that God judges what he does just as much as the King.

Commonly in hierarchical structures, whether government or business, those in the structure seek to please their manager. They may adopt their management style and behaviour. If a senior manager

regularly berates staff for their perceived failings as a means of "improving" performance, junior managers may do likewise. Pleasing the boss is seen as the route to advancement, and imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, as the saying goes. Similarly, if the senior manager is ruthless at disposing of "under-performers", more junior managers tend to follow suit. And if anyone is seen as an obstacle or competitor to promotion: neutralize the threat - get your knife in first. Daniel is not out for self-aggrandizement. When (ch.2:14) he learns from Arioch, commander of the King's guard, of the royal command to kill the wise men who cannot interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream, he acts corporately (the King and empire can only lose from the execution of the order) and out of concern for the welfare of his colleagues in the King's service by asking for time to come up with the interpretation. When he asks the King for promotion, it is not for himself, but for three other exiles from Judah, with whom he prays, whose abilities he knows. He knows that they too see service of the King as service of God (ch.2:49).

Corporate culture depends greatly on the management style of those at the top, which may be quite different to what they, and the corporate mission statement, espouse. Set a competitive tone by your actions, and you will get competition; set a collaborative tone and you will get collaboration. The corporate culture Daniel worked in was decidedly the former. Successive Kings were quite ready to impose the death penalty for failure to deliver, whether interpreting a dream or bowing to a golden idol (ch.3). Many royal servants exploited this for their own ends, denouncing the foreign Judaeans civil servants at any opportunity.

Daniel and his three colleagues stood out because they did not fall in with the corporate culture. They were already outsiders as foreigners. Standing aside from



dog eat dog set them apart further. Daniel's concern is to serve the king faithfully, telling it like it is when necessary. Successive kings saw this and knew that they could rely on Daniel's integrity, even if they did not like what they heard. They would get the truth, not flattery. Nor does Daniel come across as feeling morally superior. He does not turn round and thumb his nose at the king-pleasers when they cannot deliver the goods. He does not smugly say "I told you so" when he thrives on a vegetarian diet. He does not demand that those who engineered his stay in the pit of lions be thrown in themselves after the Persian takeover; it is the king who does that. There is a lesson here: we may be able to influence the corporate culture, but do not expect to change it completely, and learn to live with what we cannot change.

There is a particular lesson when it comes to mergers and acquisitions. Daniel was on the wrong end of two hostile takeovers: Judah by Babylon, Babylon by Persia. In both cases the CEO of the target had neglected the company's defences against predators. Jehoiakim, king of Judah, relied too heavily on the expectation that the king of Egypt would act as White Knight and come to the rescue should Judah be threatened. The CEO of Babylon, Belshazzar, was too busy partying, swigging from the goblets looted from Jerusalem, to notice the threat. The range of counters to a threatened takeover makes entertaining reading: Bankmail, Greenmail, Whitemail, the Crown Jewel defence (flog off all the worthwhile assets), Scorched-earth defence (flog off everything), Lobster trap, Killer bees, Shark repellent, and my favourite: the Nancy Reagan defence ("Just say no"). Whether they go through or not, the threat of a merger or acquisition is disruptive, especially for the staff of all the companies or organizations involved.

The reasons for wanting to take over a competitor vary, but usually include: increasing sales or revenue, venturing into new markets, the assets held by the target, economies of scale and organization, enlarged

brand portfolio, and decreased competition. Babylon took over Judah to gain control of trade routes through the area; Persia took over Babylon to get rid of a competitor and control the Tigris and Euphrates valleys. But when a merger or takeover fails it is usually because of a failure to integrate the people. Mergers and takeovers often also mean job cuts. Employees of the target fear they will lose out; those of the bidder that they will be replaced by cheaper or more efficient alternatives at the target. The knives come out; there is much jockeying for position; and some will be thrown to the lions. How organizations manage such upheavals says much of their priorities. Are staff told truthfully as much as they can be told? Are staff welfare and re-training among the highest priorities?

Business consultant Dan Stockdale puts it like this: "Rarely do those driving the process stop to think about the individuals within the company who make it run. Even when human resources departments are involved with the deal, they usually cease to think of the employees as individuals and look instead at the budget they have been given and think of people as numbers they have to place within the parameters of that budget: 'We are going to have 25 people in marketing and 50 in accounting. Who will it be? Or, who won't it be?'

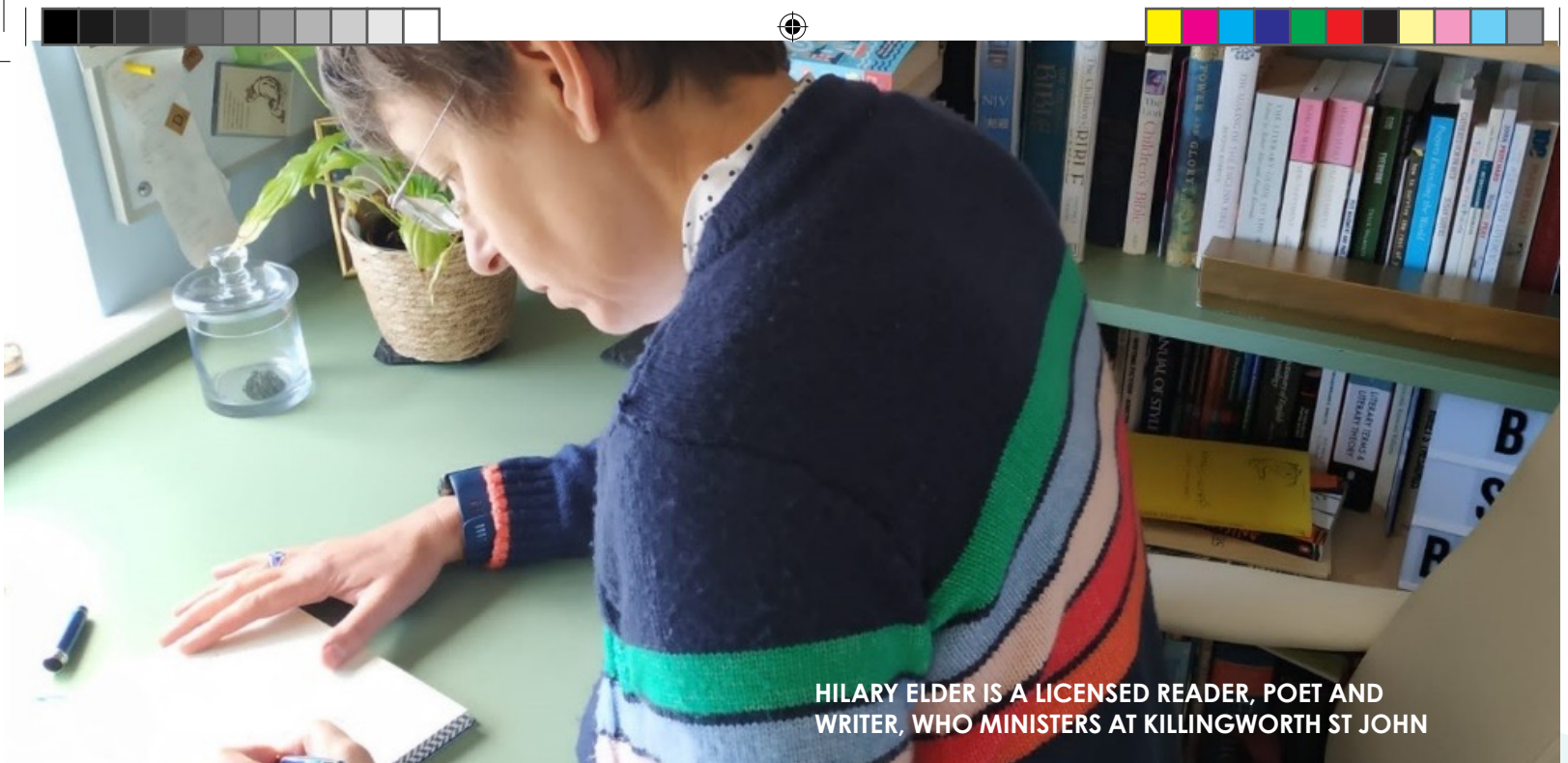
"Often, when executives think the merger is going fine, the employees have an entirely different take on the situation. Employees who are aware a deal is taking place are naturally concerned about themselves and their futures At this point they have three primary questions: 'Will I have a job?' 'How much will I be paid?' 'What benefits will I have?'"

Daniel was twice seen as an obstacle by those who thought he had usurped their rightful place in the hierarchy. He also stood in the way of their "perks". Being incorruptible - not influenced by bribes of money or power - was a threat to those who saw this as part of the job. Has it been suggested to us that we might gain by smoothing the path for someone or something? Is there a culture of "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours"? Or routinely taking back-handers? Are we seduced by it? Daniel wasn't, so his enemies conspired to remove him so "normal service" could be resumed. Bribes did not work, so they attacked him at the only point they could: his faith. Darius was engineered into passing a law that flattered him, and a trap was set. Inevitably Daniel fell into it and was condemned to the lions' den (ch.6). That he walked out unscathed the following morning is testimony to God having watched over a faithful servant. It was not that God intervened to be there with Daniel, they were always with each other. Daniel lived in the presence of God, at work as at prayer. Finally, the Kings whom Daniel served not only recognized that he was an able and reliable servant, they realized that his faith was a major reason why (see ch.4 and 6). Do our employers, managers and colleagues see the same in us? Do we follow the crowd, unquestioning followers of our workplace culture? Or, by faith, do we seek to influence for good and God?

“

we may be able to influence the corporate culture, but do not expect to change it completely, and learn to live with what we cannot change.

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HILARY ELDER IS A LICENSED READER, POET AND WRITER, WHO MINISTERS AT KILLINGWORTH ST JOHN

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Behold, I am doing a new thing (Isaiah 43.19)

After a sabbatical working in lay development on Teesside, I returned to Newcastle Diocese in late 2022.

Since my licensing in 2007 I had been ministering in the benefice where I have lived for over 30 years, and in my two years away, lots had changed there, including more Readers joining the team. Rather than trying to elbow me back into my old slot, it was decided to send me somewhere new, and after some careful thought and prayer, I was sent down the road to Killingworth.

Two years in seems like a good moment to share some learning from the experience. Every Reader ministry is unique, but I hope that some of what I have to say might resonate with Readers and incumbents and encourage prayerful conversations about the purpose and potential of our ministry.

Before I came to Killingworth, we (Acting Area Dean, Incumbent and I, with PCC involvement

and approval) looked at the parish's priorities and my gifts, as well as my capacity (one day a week); and we drafted a Work Agreement focusing on helping to lead the development of children's, young people's and families' work; a priority in the parish's Mission Action Plan.

This had important consequences for my work. I preach a lot less than I used to; the parish is rich with good preachers and my time is better used elsewhere. I thought I would miss it – I like the sound of my own voice – but what has replaced it more than fills the void (see below for more on this). I attend parish events, but not all of them because I need to protect my time; and people understand this because my role has been properly agreed and shared.

My arrival has not changed the church's direction, but it has helped things to grow faster by increasing capacity – and by being focused about how we have used that capacity. We now have monthly Toddler Church and Brick Church, and a regular Junior Church on Sunday mornings, which has 12 members and a regular attendance

of about 6, aged 2-10. We have also seen parents baptized, confirmed and becoming active members of our church family.

There are, I hope, lessons here for many parishes. Readers talk a lot about being used, and churches talk a lot about not having capacity to do what they long to do. There is a sweet spot where you can be both focused and flexible. It is living out Rowan Williams' definition of mission as noticing what God is doing and joining in. Reader Working Agreements are pretty dull-looking documents, but using them well can help us inhabit this sweet spot.

On a diocesan level, I think it is worth considering seriously the benefits of sending Readers

What is a church family? We are all God's adopted children, and every church family I have been a member of has involved a mix of good and bad things about family life. A parish church must surely be open and welcoming to new members; it is God's charge on us. And just as surely, this change will transform those who have been there a while; it is like getting a new grandchild or in-law. The push-and-pull of old and new is tricky, and essential to growing our identity in Christ, expanding our understanding of what it is to be God's children through the people God is sending us.

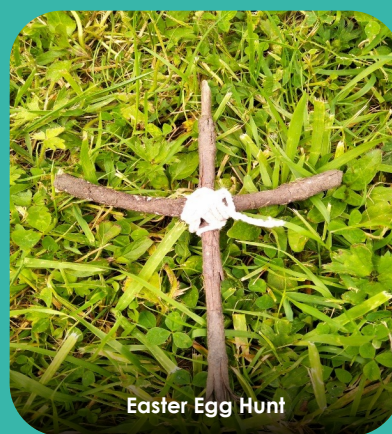
How should we read the Bible? My other two jobs are teaching English to speakers of other languages, and writing poems and stories for



Children's Christmas Tree



Children's Summer Fair Tent



Easter Egg Hunt

more often. While our embeddedness in our communities is valuable, we are as susceptible as anyone to getting stuck in our ruts, and I think we might be less frustrated at being underused if we and our colleagues spend some energy clarifying and sharing our purpose.

Enough of strategy and organisation for now. I want to share something more personal, too. As my ministry changes my own faith grows. Our children and families are helping me explore key questions, including:

What is worship? Helping to design a liturgy for toddler church has made me think afresh about what happens each Sunday when we gather before God. Finding the 'right' worship style matters, and so does coming together to share in our diversity. Our new monthly family communion draws on the variety of our worship, trying to help us understand each other better. Finding ways of sharing that enable us to respect and encourage each other will always be work in progress, and it is really vital to our life together.

children and adults; so, questions about reading and interpretation matter to me. Every week I think about how to enable our children to engage with and learn from the Bible; and it is every bit as challenging as preparing a sermon for grownups. We must use language children understand – which includes playing games, craft, singing ... but it is far from dumbing down. The Bible is present to us whoever we are and whatever is happening in our lives, and my task is to enable children to begin that lifelong relationship. As I try to do this, I find that my ministry is enabling me to 'change and become like a little child,' (Matthew 18.3). It is a blessing that, at the moment, feels not only like a challenge but also the pearl of great price.

“

We are all God's adopted children, and every church family I have been a member of has involved a mix of good and bad things about family life.

ACCA: ANGLO SAXON BISHOP SAINT

‘dearest and most blessed of all bishops who dwell on earth’



**FRANCES STRIDE
IS A READER AT
HEXHAM ABBEY
AND SECRETARY
TO THE READERS’
BOARD**

These words were written by Bede in his biblical commentary ‘On the First Part of Samuel’, which he dedicated to his bishop, mentor and friend.

So, who was this Anglo-Saxon Bishop Saint?

Acca was born in c. 660, probably to a Northumbrian noble or royal family, as he spent his early years being trained in church life with Bosa, Bishop of York. Sometime around 685 he left York to join Wilfrid, another Northumbrian bishop saint, sharing in his exile and long journeys to Rome. On the death of Wilfrid in c. 709 Acca was made Bishop of Hexham. But little did he know what turbulent times he would face. In the course of the next thirty years there would be six different kings of Northumbria, all jostling for power, with factional fighting, murder, intrigue, plots, kidnapping, and a short civil war.

For the See of Hexham to survive and flourish, Acca built up relationships with kings and nobility, and with other Anglo-Saxon monasteries. First, he concentrated on Wilfrid’s cathedra dedicated to St Andrew at Hexham.

Acca’s Church

Acca’s achievements during his time as Bishop of Hexham were many. After Wilfrid’s death, he endeavoured to complete and further adorn the cathedra at Hexham, which was founded by Wilfrid in c. 674 on the land given to him by Queen Etheldreda for this purpose. This site is now Hexham Abbey.

Bede tells us that Acca enlarged and decorated Wilfrid’s cathedra: “Acca ... being himself a most active man, and great in the sight of God and man, he much adorned and added to the structure of his church, which is dedicated to the Apostle St Andrew. For he

made it his business, and does so still, to procure relics of the blessed apostles and martyrs of Christ from all parts, to place them on altars, dividing the same by arches in the walls of the church, and gave ornaments of gold, silver and precious stones. He likewise industriously provided holy vessels, lights, and such like things as appertain to the adorning of the house of God.”

The Frith Stool

Our Anglo-Saxon ‘bishop’s throne’ is one of only two surviving stone examples of Anglo-Saxon date, the other being at Beverley Minster. The Frith Stool was almost certainly commissioned by Bishop Wilfrid and used by Acca during his own time as a bishop. Frith is an Anglo-Saxon word meaning ‘peace’ or ‘security’, and this reveals the Frith Stool’s other use: fugitives could seek sanctuary in the church and the stool was seen as the central, safest point to reach.

Acca and Music

Bishop Acca was an outstanding cantor and his legacy of such early church music reaches across the centuries to us today. Music continues to be a huge and special part of the life of Hexham Abbey, expressed through daily worship, our choirs, music scholars, the Phelps Organ, and an extensive programme of concerts.

Acca ensured that the framework for the life of a Christian community was fitting for the faith being celebrated, of which music was an integral part. Bede describes Acca as a most experienced cantor having a particular concern for the proper performance of liturgical chant. He invited a famous cantor named Maban, who had been instructed in methods of singing by the successors of the disciples of St Gregory in Kent, to instruct him and his people. Acca kept him at Hexham for twelve years, where he taught them church music that was new to them, while the music which they once knew was restored to its original form.

Acca’s Library

Acca was a great theologian and teacher. Bede tells us that Acca diligently gathered the histories of the blessed martyrs and apostles, together with other ecclesiastical writings, and built at Hexham a most numerous and noble library. Acca avidly collected texts and books that helped explain the Roman correction of the Anglo-Saxon Church, which was the church’s teachings at this time in Northumbria. We know from the time of the conversion to Christianity of Anglo-Saxons in England through to the seventh and eighth centuries, libraries of



BISHOP SAINT ACCA: Photo © 2025 Matthew Buick



FRITH STOOL: Photo © 2025 Matthew Buick



ACCA'S CROSS DETAIL: Photo © 2025 Matthew Buick



ACCA'S CROSS FROM ST ACCA EXHIBITION 2024: Photo © 2025 Phil Hughes

different kinds were assembled. Unfortunately, many of these treasured libraries and scriptoriums were lost in the Viking raids during the following centuries. Of Acca's library we have no trace. It was burnt to the ground during a Scottish raid in 1296 and we can only guess the range of books he would have written, collected, or commissioned others to write, from references made by Bede and Stephen of Ripon.

Acca's Patronage

Bishop Acca's patronage stretched far and wide, from Hexham to Wearmouth-Jarrow in the east, Whithorn to the west, and Ripon to the south. He promoted the veneration of St Oswald at Heavenfield and Hexham, formed a deep relationship with Wearmouth-Jarrow monastery, and had a profound and lasting friendship with the scholarly monk Bede, later celebrated as the Venerable Bede and, finally, from 1899, as Saint Bede.

Wilfrid and Abbot Tatberht

To honour Wilfrid's memory, together with Abbot Tatberht of Ripon, Acca encouraged Stephen of Ripon to write his *Vita Wilfridi* (Life of Wilfrid). Along with Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, these are the two main sources for our knowledge of Wilfrid.

St Oswald

Since the foundation of Hexham in c. 674, the monks had made an annual pilgrimage the seven miles north

to Heavenfield to celebrate Oswald and his Christian victory against the pagans. Acca further consolidated this tradition by building a church at Heavenfield and promoting the veneration of St Oswald centred there and at Hexham.

Wearmouth-Jarrow Monastery

When Ceolfrith stood down as abbot of Wearmouth-Jarrow monastery in 716, Hwaetberht was elected as abbot. Once this was confirmed with Ceolfrith (who was waiting for a ship at Hull to make his last pilgrimage to Rome), Bishop Acca was invited to perform the blessing and consecration of the new abbot. From then onwards, the relationship between Wearmouth-Jarrow and Hexham became stronger and deeper.

Acca's Friendship With Bede

Sometime before 716 Acca was introduced to Bede's writings at Wearmouth-Jarrow by Hwaetberht. Bede had dedicated his first commentary to Hwaetberht, *The Explanation of the Apocalypse*, and Hwaetberht either sent or took this commentary to Acca.

Acca became one of Bede's main patrons and actively encouraged him to write his commentaries. Bede dedicated eleven of these to Acca, with the help and support of Abbot Hwaetberht. Also, as

Bede's diocesan bishop, Acca was in an excellent position to circulate Bede's works to a wider audience throughout Northumbria and further afield. These deepening relationships, built upon expanding the teachings and theology of the Anglo-Saxon Church, were also a basis for continuing church reform. Many of Bede's commentaries are preoccupied with Christian leadership, which is well attested by scholars working today on Bede's texts as reforming documents. It may be that whilst actively involved in church reform, Acca and his patron, King Ceolwulf, ran into trouble, which ended in a brief deposition of the king.

All good stories have a mystery at their heart, and Acca is no exception. One line in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles (Peterborough Manuscript E) states: "731: Acca fled the see of Hexham." To this day, with no further written evidence coming to light, we still do not know the reason for Acca's flight from Hexham. But bishops were not immune from violent times, and Acca fled, perhaps to Pictavia, or possibly to Whithorn, both places in present day Scotland.

Acca's Cross

Acca's Cross is the monumental stone-carved cross in the South Transept of the Abbey.

History of Acca's Cross

The cross was probably commissioned and carved in the first or second quarter of the eighth century, and later destroyed during the raids of the Vikings in the late ninth century. Although the actual stone pieces of the cross were lost for over a thousand years, there was a memory of it recorded in Symeon of Durham's *Historia Regum* in the twelfth-century.

The pieces of the cross were rediscovered, and identified, in the nineteenth-century by Charles Clement Hodges and William Collingwood. Hodges tells us that the first of these was brought to light in 1858, when the eastern chapels were removed from the Abbey. Another, the largest piece, was used as the lintel of a doorway at a house in Dilston, and was given by the Commissioners of Greenwich Hospital to the Cathedral Library at Durham. The collection of early carved stones made by Mr Joseph Fairless passed into the possession of the Dean and Chapter of Durham in 1868. In 1874 two more fragments of the same cross, which fitted to one another, were found in an old building adjoining St Mary's Chare in Hexham. These were purchased by the Revd Canon Greenwell, and deposited along with the other pieces in the Cathedral Library at Durham. It was not until 1935 that the then Rector of Hexham Abbey, the Revd J V C Farquhar, prevailed upon the Dean and Chapter of Durham Cathedral to return Acca's Cross to its home. The site for its installation in the South Transept was approved by Sir Eric Maclagan and Sir Charles Pears.

In Summary

Acca was bishop here at Hexham over thirteen hundred years ago, and we primarily remember him for



establishing early church music with all its rich heritage, which still contributes greatly to the life of the Abbey today. The contemporary writings of Bede and Stephen of Ripon, alongside the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, and the later works of Symeon of Durham, Prior Richard of Hexham, and Aelred of Rievaulx, reveal a picture of a complex and deeply learned man. He was a writer, a theologian, a musician, a teacher, and a patron of the arts. His patronage stretched far and wide, beyond the See of Hexham, and he should be remembered for his promotion of the veneration of St Oswald, which was, early on, instrumental in the Saint's story spreading throughout the British Isles and to the Continent beyond. Probably his greatest, and most lasting, achievement is the part he played in teaching, encouraging and establishing Bede as a serious writer promoting the teachings and theology of the Anglo-Saxon Church, alongside his historical and scientific works.

However, the ongoing mystery at the heart of Acca's story, why he disappeared in c. 731 when having to flee the See of Hexham, will possibly never be solved. Whatever the reason though, when he died in c. 740, Acca's body was received by his successor, Bishop Frithberht, for burial at Hexham. Also Acca's many miracles reveal how he was loved and revered by the fraternity of Hexham Priory, and the wider community, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and how that memory has reached across the years to us today.

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- Moore Manuscript** - Anonymous Annals in the Moore Manuscript - date of composition 734 or later
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- Raine, J.**, The Priory of Hexham

SOCIETY OF ST JEROME



For the Study of the New Testament

CANON RICHARD BRYANT (rkbryant28@gmail.com) - SECRETARY.

The Society of Saint Jerome was formed at the beginning of the 20th century as an entirely clerical group, dedicated to reading the New Testament in Greek. In the 1980s it morphed into an open group, still dedicated to studying the New Testament, but from a variety of perspectives, including contemporary usage in churches and taking into account the fruits of recent as well as older research. Some, but not all, of its current members have a nodding acquaintance with New Testament Greek, and they do share any linguistic insights from time to time, but in the main we study the books of the New Testament in English versions. We hope that participants will derive spiritual, homiletic, ministerial and interpretive benefits from our corporate study.

We have been in the habit of studying gospels and epistles (including Acts and Revelation) in turn. At the moment we are reading Luke and

have reached chapter 7. To give you a flavour of the areas of life and faith we discuss, in our last couple of sessions, which were fairly typical, we looked at:

- **comparisons between the Lukan and Matthean beatitudes**
- **the challenges of trying to live by Jesus' counter-cultural call to love enemies in today's sharply fragmented world**
- **the feasibility of disinterested relationships**
- **the unsettling prospect of rewards being dangled before us**
- **the cross-cultural expressions of the golden rule**
- **Jesus' call to 'be merciful' alongside his call to 'be complete/perfect' in Matthew's account (Lk 6:36, cf Mt 5:48)**
- **the tension between forgiveness and repentance in the outworkings of divine and human grace**
- **the importance of self-criticism to engender respect and well-being in families, groups and societies.**



Until the pandemic we met in person, usually in the Cathedral, but since then we have been meeting by Zoom. I will gladly send you the link. We are always open to new members, and you will be very welcome to join us on the **third Monday of every month, except August, December and (when the third Monday is close to Easter) April 11.00am to 12.30pm**. Some of us take it in turns to lead sessions, but not everyone does, and there is no obligation: it is your presence and attentive involvement which we will value.

The next dates are Mondays 16 June, 21 July. Please let Richard Virden or me know if you have any questions, and if you hope to come on any of the dates.

REVD DR RICHARD VIRDEN (rev.virden@gmail.com) - CHAIRMAN

LAST WRITES

GLORIA BRYANT IS READER WITH PTO AT
NEWCASTLE ST FRANCIS



spellbinding. Some have argued that nothing would have been lost by omitting the final twist in the story, except that the point is that no Pope, no spiritual leader, no person is without flaws. Benitez had disobeyed the late Pope by not proceeding with a medical intervention

which would have removed the physical evidence of his condition. He too broke the rules.

In November last year, Richard and I went to the cinema to see *Conclave*, a film based on, and almost faithful to, the novel of the same title by Robert Harris, which we had both read.

If you have read the book or seen the film, or indeed if you have not and wish to, I apologise for writing a short synopsis. The Pope has died and the College of Cardinals convenes under the leadership of its Dean Cardinal Thomas Lawrence. Four candidates emerge as likely successors: an American described as a progressive reformer, a Nigerian who is a social conservative, a Canadian described as a moderate and an Italian described as a traditionalist. Lawrence is surprised when the Mexican-born Archbishop Benitez of Kabul arrives to claim a place in the conclave – he had been made a cardinal in pectore by the late Pope the year before. In pectore meant that his appointment was kept secret, so no public announcement had been made. What at this stage Benitez does not reveal is that the Pope had arranged a medical appointment for him in Switzerland, which Benitez had cancelled. Cardinal Lawrence begins conclave with a homily and encourages the cardinals to 'embrace uncertainty,' which some of them believe is Lawrence's bid to be elected Pope himself.

However, as the story unfolds, three of the 'frontrunners' have something in their past to make them unworthy of the papal office: one is guilty of an inappropriate sexual liaison, another has bribed some cardinals to vote for him; and, after a terrorist attack on the Sistine Chapel, the third advocates a war on Islam. It is Benitez, the outsider, who is chosen as the next Pope; he then tells Lawrence that he has XXXY syndrome and thus has female reproductive organs, which, if the rules are strictly observed, bar him from the papal office. As you can imagine, the film was not embraced warmly by most of the Catholic press. My opinion, for what it is worth, is that the book was a good leisure read and the film was

In writing *Last Writes*, I have reflected again on Conclave because we have so recently witnessed the death of Pope Francis and the rapid election of his successor. The Roman Catholic Church has a new leader. It is the dawn of a new era for the majority of the world's Christians. The new Pope has chosen Leo as his papal name, and when I heard, my curiosity was piqued. There had been thirteen Pope Leos before him. What did I know about them? Well, I turned to a book I have dipped into many times: *The Popes: A History* by John Julius Norwich. Not all the Leos are renowned, and at least one of them is notorious. That was Leo X (1513-21). The son of Lorenzo Medici, he was less a bishop than a renaissance prince who loved the arts along with hunting, gambling and eating. At his coronation, the procession would have done an emperor proud: he rode from St John Lateran to St Peter's Basilica on a pure white horse accompanied by 112 equeuries. Probably the biggest scandal of his pontificate was his announcement that he had uncovered a plot against him involving some cardinals, led by Cardinal Alfonso Petrucci, who everyone in the know believed was Leo's lover. Petrucci confessed under torture and was executed by strangulation, the executioner being a Muslim Moor, because it was unlawful for a Christian to kill a prince of the church: hardly the behaviour one would expect from someone in direct descent from the Apostle Peter. A more distinguished Pope was Leo I (440-61) who brought to an end a three-year uproar in the church over the nature of Christ. His teaching that Christ had two co-existing natures was upheld by the Council of Chalcedon in 461.

However, it is Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) who inspired Robert Prevost to choose Leo as his papal name. Leo XIII became Pope after a time of considerable turmoil in European history which had affected the papacy. 'His predecessor was authoritarian and abrasive in his relations with those who ruled the European nations, particularly France and the newly-united Germany under Bismarck's chancellorship; this prompted their hostility towards Catholicism in return. Leo XIII took a more conciliatory approach.



Though he spoke out for the Church 'regularly and vigorously,' 'he spoke with a voice of calm, reason and regret.'² He gently urged the Italians to return to the faith of their ancestors, and he soothed German protestant sensitivities to the extent that Bismarck's anti-clerical measures eased and his so-called Kulturkampf was at an end by 1886. Leo was less successful in his dealings with France as it emerged from defeat in the Franco-Prussian War and the horrors of the Paris Commune. The new Third Republic was determinedly anti-clerical. Leo sent numerous encyclicals to France urging its governments to abandon their view that church and state were incompatible and realise that church and state working together would be good for the French people.

**...the point is
that no Pope, no
spiritual leader,
no person is
without flaws.**

However, it was not in the field of diplomacy that his best work was done. Leo XIII is admired most for his social awareness: 'the first Pope to face up to the fact that the world had moved into the industrial age.' He is remembered most for his encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, published in May 1891, a belated response to *Das Kapital* and *The Socialist Manifesto*. Leo XIII acknowledged that the Church had largely ignored a burgeoning working class, who were subjected to harsh working and living conditions: 'A small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the teeming masses of the labouring poor a yoke which is very little better than slavery itself,' he wrote. Pope John XXIII would later describe the encyclical as 'the Magna Carta of Catholic Social Doctrine.' After Leo XIII, Catholics and socialists could work together for the benefit of humankind; the Pope had demonstrated that, even when deprived of the lands that represented temporal power, the Papacy could still be 'a potent force on the world stage.' All that we have so far heard from Leo XIV

suggests that he too wishes to be a bridge-builder in the 21st century world which is as broken as it was at the turn of the 20th century. He will have his work cut out. His concern for the poor of this world is clear from his work as a bishop in Peru. Nevertheless, it will behove Leo XIV to remember that Leo XIII at a personal level was not all he should have been. Though in many parts of the world he was admired for his leadership of the Church and his care for the disadvantaged, he was not agreeable at a personal level. This was a consequence of his sense of how respect and reverence should be manifested when in his presence: all visitors had to kneel throughout an audience, and members of his household could never sit in his presence. Apparently, Leo XIII never spoke one word to his coachman who served him for 25 years. I dare say that, given the modern carelessness with language, some will say Leo's contempt for his coachman is unforgivable, but let us remember that the only human who could forgive Leo for his arrogant behaviour is the coachman! A better example of humility will be Leo XIV's immediate predecessor: Pope Francis seems to have been very conscious of his own failings and his need to repent. That, and his simple lifestyle endeared him to many, even to those who were not Roman Catholics.

A weight of expectation is what anyone who leads an institution must bear. However, all church leaders bear the additional burden that everyone expects an unblemished performance on every occasion; priests (and others) are the face of Jesus in their community. Anglicans are waiting (much longer than two days) for the appointment of the next Archbishop of Canterbury. Who will he/she see as an inspiration for their ministry? An examination of former Archbishops of Canterbury, as of former popes, might reveal words and actions they would not wish to emulate, but they will recognise that leadership is usually like the curate's egg – good in parts. When it is good, it should be acknowledged, when it is less than we expect, compassion should be shown. Let us keep Pope Leo XIV and those who will have responsibility for appointing the next Archbishop of Canterbury in our prayers.

¹ Leo XIII's predecessor was Pius IX (Pio Nono), who had resisted the movement to unify the many states of Italy into one nation. He could not contemplate giving up control of the Papal States and Rome itself. Italy was unified in stages under King Victor Emmanuel I, but the Pope retained control of Rome until 1870, when the people of Italy voted in a plebiscite that the city should become Italy's capital. Troops entered the city and the Pope conceded defeat, retreating to the Vatican. However, the Pope was guaranteed, among other privileges, possession of the Vatican, Castel Sant' Angelo and the summer residence at Castel Gandolfo. These were known as 'the Guarantees.' Relations between the Italian state and the Papacy remained hostile until 1929, when through a Concordat between Mussolini and Pope Pius XI, the Vatican City State was created. Pio Nono was the Pope who summoned the First Vatican Council in 1869, declared Papal Infallibility and wrote the Syllabus of Errors in which he stated that non-Catholics living in Catholic countries should be forbidden to practise their faith.

² This and all subsequent quotations come from *The Popes: A History* by John Julius Norwich, Vintage 2012, ISBN954009, pages 405-409.