



November 2016 - The story unfolds...

Dear friends,

Our adventure leading NEARER - a Fresh Expression of church - continues to surprise and encourage us. To be truthful there are also times of disappointment and confusion too. It is all part of the package of walking with God and His people.

Vince, our vicar, has returned from sabbatical and we are excited to see how God seems to be blessing the church and giving us people to work with. Last Sunday we had 3 new people who just came along of their own volition, without any former contact! Sounds like God is at work!

We at NEARER are delighted that three of our community have been accepted to be licensed as Pioneers by the Bishop of Leicester. This is the first time in the diocese that licensed pioneers will have come from within a Fresh Expression of church, and we see that both as a sign of health and of God's blessing. These three people have now joined Sharon & I as leaders of our NEARER community and we look forward to their deeper involvement going forward. They will be formally licensed by the Bishop himself who will attend a NEARER Wednesday evening session and perform the licensing as part of that – another first!

NEARER has also been approved as a placement centre both for a candidate for Lay Reading and for a Curate. Hopefully their interaction with NEARER will bring blessing and insight both to them and to us, as they help us reflect on what we do from an outsider's perspective.

The prayers that we have prayed for the Hallam Fields estate are being answered in a major way! The new primary school is being built as I write and will open in September 2017. We look forward to being a part of the life of this school and may even be able to meet on its premises.

A 73 bed care home has also opened on the estate and the management team are very positive about community involvement. It has been agreed that initially that some NEARER members will be present one morning a month in the home, just being a prayerful presence and being available to residents and families to chat. We will see how things progress from there.

As a Christmas village event we are organising the "Birstall Sheep Trail". The scenario is that the sheep from the



nativity have lost their way and are hiding out in the shops of Birstall! Knitted sheep (oh! the irony!) will be placed in shop windows and people have to note the names of the sheep and the shops they appear in. A prize draw will be made of the correct entries and winners will get a woolly sheep. Sounds silly I know, but the accompanying website (www.birstallsheeptrail.org) will help people explore the Christmas story and also tell them about all the Christmas services being held in all the churches in Birstall.

As we are over half way through our 3 year contract it was encouraging to have a chat with the Bishop in his recent visit to the parish when he was very positive about trying to extend that contract for a few more years. We will have to see how this pans out, lots of money to be found and details to be worked out etc., but it is encouraging to see that the NEARER project is likely to be supported by a paid pioneer for a few more years, as it is still very much in its infancy.

As a family we are looking forward to Christmas, both Ben and Joshua will be visiting us in Leicester, which is great. Sadly Caleb will not be able to make it as he has no annual leave left. Caleb is still waiting to be told when he will go away to continue his police training as he moves up a grade. This will probably be in the spring.

Next year will be a big year for the March family as Joshua should graduate with his PhD and also get married! We are delighted to be welcoming Lindsay MacKay into our family and we will be experiencing a Highland wedding in Inverness in August.

Your prayers for our car situation were answered, at least temporarily, as someone gave us £1,000 to enable us to buy a more practical car for the winter. We now have a 2004 Ford Focus which has the added advantage of 4 doors and 5 seats!

Our beloved 1999 Mazda MX5 has to go for an MoT at the end of the month and we will need to see what they say about the rust issues. We don't have the money to repair it at the moment, so we will just have to decide what to do when they tell us the situation. You might pray for wisdom and guidance about this.



As a closing thought can I share with you something I read recently;

*"Jacob had his famous dream in which he saw a ladder going up to heaven. The greatest impact that the dream had upon Jacob was the realisation that he had been in a holy place and not known it.
The God who surprises had been loitering with the intent to bless and redeem."¹*

Where might God be present around you today? Are you living in the expectation that He is 'loitering with the intent to bless you'?

Thank you again for your faithful prayers and support which is the only reason we are still here, loving God, having fun, and involved in His mission in the world. Be blessed, be a blessing!

Stephen, Sharon, Ben, Josh, and Caleb MARCH

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¹ Russ PARKER, *Visions in the Night*, London : SPCK, 2012, p5 (adapted)