

A life worth living

People throughout the Parish of Cowley were shocked and saddened by the death of Gwen Ranklin. She was larger than life. She touched the lives of many. As we remember her life I think there are some valuable things we can learn.

I first met Gwen when I was interviewed for the position of Team Rector. I knew right away that she was one in a million. She was supportive, encouraging, insightful, and warm. She loved to laugh. She always encouraged and supported me in my ministry. Gwen was a very determined person who wanted to make a difference. She worked to make the parish, the diocese and the city more supportive, caring, and nurturing places. Through her work as a member of Bishop's Council and Diocesan Synod, she touched the lives of many people. She was a Chair of Governors at St Christopher's C of E School in Cowley, a trustee of PACT, and she was instrumental in establishing *Homestart* whose objective is to "see a society in which every parent has the support they need to give their children the best possible start in life." She was the church warden for more than 20 years. I could go on and on about her service and dedication. I'm sure each person who knew her has their own individual stories and memories of how Gwen helped, supported, cajoled, nurtured, aided,

laughed and cried with them.

But the measure of a life isn't found in how much we do or accomplish. Life is a gift. Because we only get one, it's worth thinking about what makes your life or mine a life worth living. Abraham Lincoln put it this way. "In the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years." At the centre of Gwen's life was her faith.

Gwen's faith grew and matured over the years. She joined one of the first Alpha courses put on by the parish. It helped her to know beyond a doubt that God is real, and that his love for us is real, and that he wants us to live in a relationship with him. That made a big impression on her.

The Sunday after she died the Gospel reading contained these words from Jesus. "Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat on that house but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock." In her life, Gwen's motivation came more and more from her desire to act on Christ's words. She wanted to demonstrate God's love to the world around her. Jesus said in many different ways that our faith needs to be demonstrated through our actions.

Chronicle

How do we live like that? Take a look at Gwen's life. She was there for everyone. She got involved. She was willing to show up at events, look at what was needed, and pitch in. It might be supporting and helping the new priest – over the years she was there for many of us. It might be sitting and listening to someone who was having a difficult time. It might be arranging the flowers, or organising the flower show, or the fete, or doing the washing-up, or organising a trip, or greeting people at the door or administering communion. The list

goes on. Frederick Buechner says, "The life I touch for good or ill will touch another life, and that in turn another, until who knows where the trembling stops or in what far place my touch will be felt."

It's not that we need to do exactly what Gwen did, but we can look at her example. Gwen's love of God inspired her to use her talents and the gifts God gave her. When each of us puts our faith into action in even the smallest way, we are building a life worth living.

Marathon Man



A big thank you to everyone in Cowley who supported me in my London Marathon efforts this year. I have been able to raise £1,370 so far for Sobell House Hospice Charity to help them with the fantastic work that they do.

I thoroughly enjoyed the race this year – it was an amazing experience, and the weather was a bit kinder than last year too. I did have run through a spell of torrential rain, but the sun came out again for my last 5 or 6 miles!

I was very pleased to complete the race inside my 3-and-a-half hour target, finishing in 3 hours 27 minutes.

Thanks again for all your support this year, and in previous years too, I really appreciate it.

Rob Butler

Healing Services

3rd July at St Francis.
(to be confirmed)

7 August at St James.

4th Sept. at St Francis.
(to be confirmed)

The Chronicle Changes

Rosanne Butler is taking over as editor of *The Chronicle*. Please submit news and articles to Rosanne by the 20th of each month.

The double issue for July/August will be available from 6th July

ROSANNE INTERVIEWS James Grote

Ask anyone who has enjoyed a snack, a coffee or a tasty lunch at the Broomtree Café, ask anyone who has enjoyed the new and interesting artwork displayed in the Ark-t Centre or anyone (like me!) who smiles as they walk past the giant "tin cans" outside the John Bunyan Church and I'm sure they will tell you that the whole place is buzzing. If they do, I promise you, that would be music to James Grote's ears as, alongside his Christian ministry in Cowley he told me he wants to set his church in the centre of the community it serves. Add to the art and good food the facility for local musicians to use the music studio and you soon see what changes he has set in place during the thirteen years he has been working in our area.

When he took up his post as minister at John Bunyan's he found himself with the challenge of a group of people fully prepared to listen and explore the new vision he brought with him even though they were used to traditions which had been in place for years. Also like most churches the shortage of money was a problem. The changes needed to be relevant he felt the situation was something of a crisis. It was difficult to know where to begin.

But first let us find out something of the personality behind the name. James is an Essex man, born in Elm Park, a suburban area near Romford. Whilst he was still quite young the family moved, first to Billericay and next to Saffron Waldon where he attended a very good Quaker school which effected a strong influence on his young life. He believes that the ethos there shaped him as a person giving him a clear perception between faith and life. He also believes that strong faith should be willing to ask questions, there being no "black or white" answers. He says he gets a buzz when people are enquiring because that's when new things, often good things, happen.

His was a happy childhood, growing up with an elder brother whom he describes as a "good mate". Not a particularly academic child he preferred the more creative subjects such as art, woodwork and so on - he was also good at sport. He told me, interestingly, that he thinks more in pictures than words. It was during his early teens that James became a Christian and joined the Baptist Church. For "A" levels he took exams in religious education, geography and government and politics. From school he went on to the

Northern Baptist College in Manchester to do a degree in theology.

Since he had gone straight from school to college it was deemed a good idea that as a young man he should learn something of the wider world and so he worked for two years as a clerk with a shipping company, a hospital porter and a houseparent in the National Children's Home in Nottingham. He then returned to his Manchester College for his final pastoral course.

At twenty four, ready for his first ministerial post he was appointed to a small church in Leicester. It was quite a demanding post, one would imagine, as the church was situated in a mainly Hindu/Asian community and James led it single handed. After three years he moved to a bigger church in Derby where he was a minister for six years. By this time he had met and married Susan. She had been a student I pharmacy at Nottingham University when he was on placement at the church she attended. It was love at, almost, first sight he admitted (a little shyly) and they were married a year later.

Whilst in Derby he and Susan became involved with

the Baptist Mission Society which was doing important work in the war-torn country of El Salvador. He met people who had been there and heard their stories.

James decided to make a visit and soon new that he had been called to work there. He took Susan and their two young sons, Daniel and Cameron, on a mission which lasted for three years. Asked how the two boys (then aged six and eight) coped with the move he assured me they were fine. He added that he is convinced that, provided children have a secure family they can deal with anything. How I do agree.

The work in El Salvador was very demanding, mainly pastoral, supporting fifteen Salvadorian ministers affected by the civil war. He visited little rural churches and coordinated a national network helping to rescue people caught up in the conflict. Once his three-year term was over the family returned to the U.K. James looked for a new challenge and found it in his present church here in Cowley. He came here and has stayed.

He began his ministry slowly looking at the positive assets that were here. He found good people, prepared for a new vision, excellent buildings in an ideal position, a lovely church and, of course, his convictions to drive him. From this new beginning

grew the living, thriving church and centre we see today. As I left one thought prevailed, "There's still more to come. Watch this space"!

How would you describe yourself as a child?

As a little boy I was extroverted and mischievous. Play and friends mattered a lot.

Have you any special childhood memories you'd like to share?

I think the thing that will stay with me for ever are summer holidays with my grandmother in Scotland. She lived in a big house with a workshop and a stream at the bottom of the garden. I would spend the summer there playing with my cousins.

Has God been part of your life since childhood?

Yes I was brought up in the church. What fascinated me about the church was the drama of the worship and through that I found my faith.

If you could make a major change in the world what would it be?

The major issue is world trade and its link with poverty. We must give countries the ability to create their own trade and get fair prices for their products.

Is there anything you find positive or encouraging about our modern world?

I think where communities with different cultural back-

grounds are making huge strides to get along. There is still a long way to go and it is here that the church can make a positive contribution.

Do you have a hero or heroine, past or present?

The minister of my church when I was growing up because he took me seriously in my call to the ministry. He was pastorally very gifted.

How do you spend your leisure time?

I walk a lot with my dog-Boars Hill area is a favourite. I enjoy gardening. I find the theatre in itself is a wonderful place; it's alive and happening, it's amazing. I collect art but it's important to me to know the artist.

Are there any places in the world you'd like to visit?

I love the extremes of climate and terrain so - Iceland, the top of Canada, Alaska or an African safari.

Do you have any plans for the future?

In fifteen years I'll be retiring. I love my job but I'll love retirement too.

