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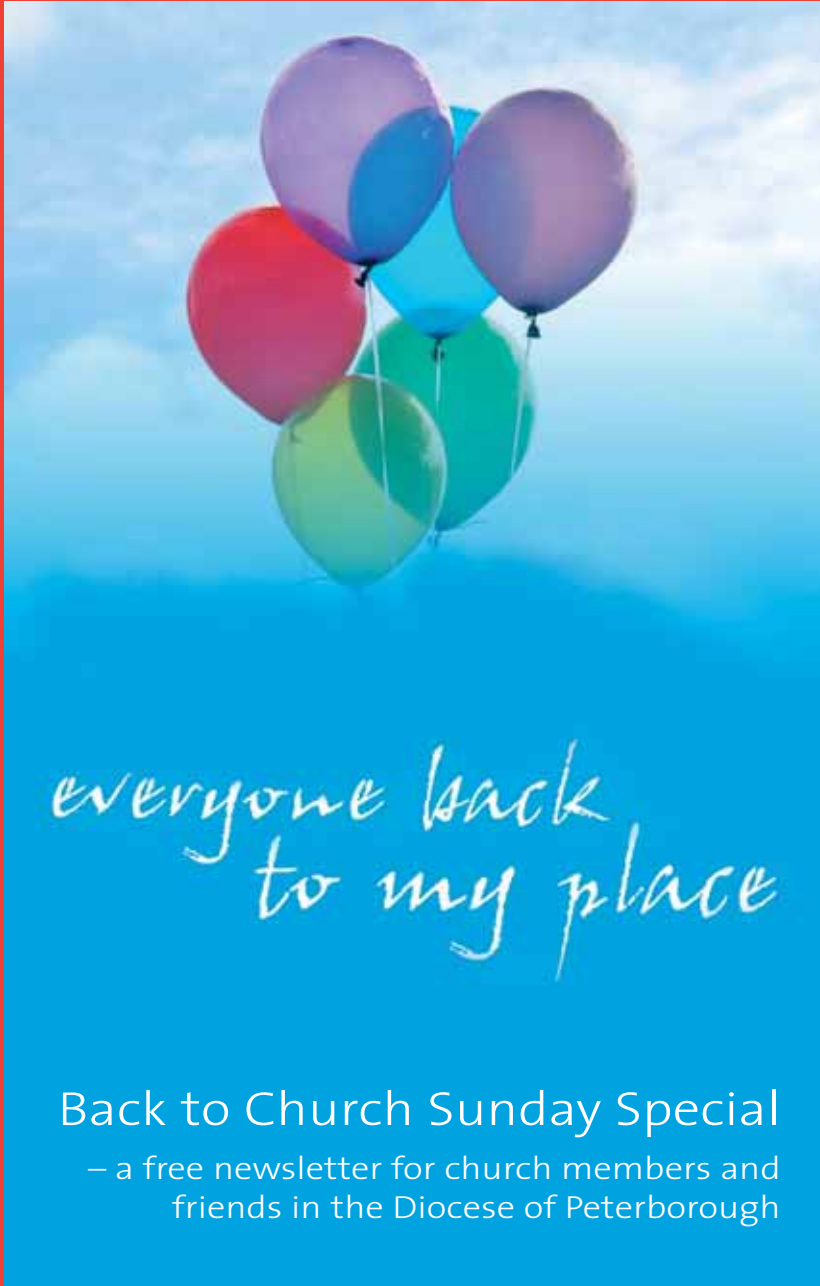
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# Cross Keys



*everyone back  
to my place*

Back to Church Sunday Special

– a free newsletter for church members and friends in the Diocese of Peterborough

# Welcome!

Welcome! It is good to see you this Sunday.

I hope that you have received a warm welcome this morning in your church. Whether it's been easy to attend or you have been nervous about coming, we are delighted to see you and to welcome you as part of the Christian family where you have and always will have a place.

"Back to Church Sunday" is an initiative which has been running for three years now, and I am delighted that this year over 190 churches in the diocese have taken part.

In this special issue of Cross Keys I hope that you enjoy reading about some of the people who have not just come back to church, but have come back to faith in Christ or found a faith for the first time.

The church is often described as a family, and that is exactly what it is. All over the diocese, there are hundreds of different shaped and sized families meeting regularly on Sundays, and during the week in a whole variety of activities. Family is about belonging, being welcome and finding a sense of place. Above all, it's a place where all of us know we are loved. It's our home.

The Christian faith teaches us that we are all loved by God and can live in relationship with Jesus Christ. The local church is a glimpse of that relationship and of God's family on earth.

However long it's been since you went to church, I hope that you feel that same sense of belonging and warmth, which is God's gift to each of us.

It's great you're here today! Welcome home!



The Rt Revd Ian Cundy  
Bishop of Peterborough



## *I'm the real deal now*

"I know those major festival readings off by heart!" says Sarah Brooks. "My grandfather was a Methodist lay minister and although we didn't always go to church as children, it was part of family life and at festivals I was often asked to read – I loved it."

As a teenager Sarah became disengaged from church. At 17 she met her husband to be and although they married in church, Sarah didn't set foot in a church again for years except for a wedding or at Christmas. "I didn't miss it", she says, "but I had a strange relationship with Christianity. I knew I still believed but it felt uncomfortable saying this and not going to church. Also, once you lose the habit other barriers loom up. I hadn't stuck around to be confirmed so I was worried that I would feel like

an outsider at communion."

It was when her daughter Georgie was very small that she first went again, to her village church at Badby. "I had this image of church as a club and I was not a proper member," she says. After taking Georgie and her brother Jake to church one Sunday Sarah was asked, with others, to help develop the family services. "I didn't

*"My fear of the church as a club has gone and I want everyone to know that they are welcome"*

feel like an outsider then and I wanted to help other people to experience church as a welcoming place too."

The children love the family services and last year, at the ages of nine and seven, Georgie and Jake decided that they wanted to be baptised. "We deliberately didn't have them baptised as babies because my husband felt strongly that it should be their decision. When

they asked themselves and chose their own God-parents, he respected that."

Sarah has also been confirmed. "I'm the real deal now! My fear of the church as a club has gone and I want everyone to know that they are welcome – even people of my generation whose only memory of church is from schooldays!"



# Looking for an excuse to come back!

"A bit in the local paper about Back to Church Sunday at Great Oakley last year came just at the right time for me," says Pam Goodman. "I was looking for an excuse to come back!"

Although she was baptised and attended St John the Baptist in Corby up until her early 20s, Pam's involvement had dwindled. "We had our children baptised, but I didn't go regularly – we moved a couple of

times and were busy with the family."

It was after her son married a Roman Catholic girl that Pam started to go to the local Catholic church with her grandchildren. "I became quite involved in St Brendan's and they made me very welcome. But it

*"I take it all in, in a way that I never did when I was younger."*

played on my mind that I couldn't receive communion. One day an Aunt visited and we went to a midweek service at St John's together. As soon as I walked in I knew I wanted to be back in my own denomination!" Then Pam saw the invitation to the service at St Michaels, Great Oakley, a short distance from her home, and thought "I'm going."

"I felt quite apprehensive," she said. "I had only been into St Michaels once and I was on my own this time. I needn't have worried – the first person I met was someone who used to live in my street."

"I can, and do, pray anywhere," says Pam, "but I look forward to that quiet time on Sunday. I feel the closeness of the Lord in that place and love the familiarity of the words. I take it all in, in a way that I never did when I was younger".



# Search for the meaning of life

"I hardly ever went to church as a child but I used to pray all the time," says Asha Collison. "Once, my Mum's friend came round because of a fight with her partner and he turned up outside the door with an axe. I prayed that he'd go away and he did. There were lots of other answers too."

Asha's Dad left when he was still young and by the age of 14 Asha was smoking cannabis and getting into trouble at school. Later in his teens he went clubbing and became involved in the drugs scene. But at the same time he was searching for a meaning to life. "I became very interested in biology, thermodynamics and all sorts of science, looking for clues as to why we are here."

After a euphoric but startling brush with death because of the drugs, Asha vowed to stop taking them. He was 19 years old. "The first three months were terrible," he said, "I'd wake up in tears and have anxiety attacks. I kept thinking about life and death and nothingness. I came to the conclusion that there was definitely a God – all that biology could not be random. I looked at various faiths but couldn't take to a particular one. I believed in God but was quite anti-religion because of all the wars it caused."

Around this time Asha went along



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to a discussion evening at St Mary's Roade. "Some of the things people said confused me but then someone handed me a book called Cure for Life. It answered so many questions and explained the claims of the Christian faith and how they are backed up. I don't know who gave me that book ... I think it was God!" After that, Asha prayed and gave his life to God.

Since then Asha has been confirmed and regularly attends St Mary's and the local Baptist church. "Alongside God and the Bible, lots of people help me in my faith - our vicar, a Christian friend at work, my Mum. I'd say to anyone, don't be put off by the outside shell of church, there's love and warmth inside."

# Don't let your worries stop you!

"Don't let doubts or worries stop you from coming to church," says Robert Goodwin. "Whatever your questions, it's OK." Robert didn't always feel like this. Both he and his wife Dawn were brought up to go to church, "but it was very rigid and formal," says Dawn, "if you didn't understand things you weren't encouraged to ask questions." Church seemed a frosty place, all about rules and regulations.

In spite of this the couple felt, "these are the rules of men, not of God". They continued to live according to Christian principles but church attendance became increasingly difficult because of family and work commitments. "Although we attended when we could," says Dawn.

"Coming back to church on retirement to Oakham was like a breath of fresh air", says Robert. "There had been tragedies in the family and I wanted to know why God had allowed these things to happen – at last I'm finding answers." As well as enjoying the Sunday worship at All Saints, Robert and Dawn plucked up courage to join a Bible class. "Some of the others know much more than we do, but I think they find our questions refreshing,"



*"I thought we'd be embarrassed to be confirmed at our age, but it wasn't like that at all."*

said Robert. "We discuss things honestly and it's a source of great inspiration and learning for me. I feel much more confident and knowledgeable in my faith. St Paul has become quite a hero of mine!"

Robert and Dawn also took confirmation classes. "I thought we'd be embarrassed to be confirmed at our age but it was not like that at all," says Dawn. "The friendship of people in church is wonderful. We feel like part of a family."

# What next?

Well you made it Back to Church and we hope that you enjoyed it. But what next?

## **Come again**

We hope that this isn't a one off and that you will come back again. Your church is just that – yours! There is always a place for you, and we hope that it will feel more and more like home to you. Ask the person who invited you this week to come with you next week as well.

## **Find out more**

We hope that you would like to find out more about the Christian faith. Many churches run sessions which are safe places to explore some of the big questions about life and faith and what the Christian faith can mean to me. Why not have a talk with your vicar or the person who you came with.

## **Get involved**

We don't want you to fill the gaps on our rotas, but we would love you to get more involved in the life of the church which ranges from coffee mornings, outings, socials, weekday fellowship meetings for all ages etc. There is plenty going on! You may find out more from a church magazine or notice sheet.

## **Pray**

Praying is about talking and listening to God. We all need plenty of practice at this, but the best way to start is with the Lord's Prayer. It was good enough for the first followers of Jesus who needed help praying and it's the best for us today too!

## **Ask!**

Jesus said: *"For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened"*. Please don't be afraid to ask about the life of your local church. There is so much to receive from being part of the family of God!

To find out more about the Christian faith, visit

[www.rejesus.co.uk](http://www.rejesus.co.uk)

To find out more about the local church in this area, visit

[www.peterborough-diocese.org.uk](http://www.peterborough-diocese.org.uk)

**Welcome back!**

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