

I became a Christian in 1975 when I was a student. I'd been brought up going to Sunday School, been a server at communion and had the benefit of a wonderful young people's ministry but not yet made a personal commitment. In my second year at Uni I had only been going to church intermittently, and out of the blue I was put on the spot by a fellow student who took me to meet his friends, where I gave my life to Christ. I ended up moving into that same shared house. I learned so much in those two years from the ministry of the Navigators (an interdenominational student movement). I received really solid foundational teaching, including attending residential training programmes. My shared outlook with Christine dates from these younger days as we both benefitted from their teaching.

After university nine years were spent in London as a member of a small local church, with terrific leadership from John Lefroy. It was he who sent us to Ecclesall when we were leaving to come to Sheffield. More years of excellent teaching from Peter Williams and his staff (esp. Harry Steele) followed and then we recently moved to this church with Alistair when we both felt God was prodding us.

I have had many roles in these churches including leading musical worship, being a home group leader, a children's worker, a youth leader, a student leader, men's ministry leader, sound desk operator, organizing men's alpha, gardener, lunch club volunteer and twice a PCC member.

God has worked powerfully in so many situations in my life, including a good few impossible ones, and I am always glad to record answered prayer. We have always been provided for and blessed in so many ways.

My Christian faith has evolved over the years and different things matter more to me now. My core belief has not essentially changed

but it is perhaps less black and white, probably more nuanced and complex. The revelation of God's mercy that led to my commitment 35 years ago has continued as a theme in my life and has been worked out in many different ways. It certainly affected my choice of career, in pursuing service through social work and has shaped my overall outlook influencing me to come alongside others. It has also given me a greater desire to see others embrace living fully in the power and freedom he gives.

The aspect I have enjoyed most in church life is the smaller scale of individual relationships often through small groups. Our last home group is an example. We developed an approach of freeing up members to say what they thought rather than give the "right" answer. In a similar way I am grateful to the friends with whom I shared a small interdenominational men's group for a few years. We used Richard Rohr's three questions in our study to produce a kind of creative thinking approach to the text.

I am braver now to check the Greek original (not so hard with the internet) and discover some of the compromises made by our Bible translators. My understanding of key passages has deepened as a result when I have seen the true meaning. I am also keen to see us lose some of the "religious" language and use ordinary words which can be understood by people who are not yet Christians.

In the years since I finished full-time paid work I have felt strongly drawn to practical mission in caring for the environment, which is often ignored in churches. My worship in this sense is often to spend a hard and sweaty day knee deep in water or scrub, working on one of the Derbyshire wildlife reserves. I also feel that Christine and I have been given the gift of so much music to enable us to be Christians in the rather non-Christian world of folk music, through

which we meet so many people. One of the things that has kept me going during lockdown is that I started learning to play the fiddle just under three years ago! I've certainly had the time to really work on this.

I give thanks for my family and for the fact that the girls have continued to stick with God.     Mike