

Ministers-at-Work

*The Journal for Christians in
Secular Ministry*

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Copy deadline for next edition: Monday 7 October 2024

Please email contributions to: rebeccacraven@gmail.com

Editorial

As I write, change is in the air. Elections across many countries mean changing leadership is a real possibility, for good or ill. So it was fitting that our CHRISM annual conference had “MSE as Prophet” as its theme. We pondered what change might be needed in our setting, how it might be brought about and whether there are signs of hope.

One area where urgent change is needed is highlighted today by the UK Climate Change Committee which reports that nationally we are not on track to meet our legally binding emissions reduction targets by 2030. Urgent action is needed, not just, although mainly, by governments, but across all sectors and by everyone. So the item on “Climate Justice – what can we do?” can help and has something for everyone. There are also some practical helps with resources on how to start and run a Christian Workplace Group. This piece is in direct response to a request from a reader but the “how to” guides only get us so far and readers with experience to share are warmly invited to start a discussion.

It is the season for holidays and it is to be hoped that you, the reader, will be getting suitable rest from your labours. Such sabbath rest gives opportunity to stop and reflect. I was delighted to receive the article “A Little Sister at Work” which gives a glimpse into the working life and ministry of a member. This can help us reflect on our own. I am always looking for contributions – why not send in a piece about a day in your working life?

Some suggestions for summer reading are included. You might try the Bible commentary or, more likely, the historical fiction based on Julian of Norwich.

This summer perhaps we could all benefit from reviewing how we might engage with CHRISM more fully.

- Are we making use of the resources on the website? I've included the August entry from the prayer diary as an example but there are lots of other resources that may be of interest. It might be helpful to switch to the electronic version of the journal as a way to easily access links in the journal and reduce resource use too.
- Might it be fun to join the CHRISM Theology Discussion Group which meets monthly via ZOOM?
- Let's put in the diary the CHRISM Reflective Weekend to be held at Shallowford, Staffordshire, 14-16 February 2025.
- Let's consider too how we might show solidarity and friendship with our European sisters and brothers. The European Conference in the Tradition of the Worker Priests is being held in Germany in October 2024. Some members are going. Could you attend too?

Whatever you're doing – have a good summer!

Rebecca Craven



A Little Sister at Work

The Order of the Little Sisters of Jesus was founded on 8 September 1939, in Touggourt, French Algeria, following the path marked out by St. Charles de Foucauld. <https://littlesistersofjesus.net/> Little Sister Kasia Barbara reflects on her work in the Co-operative store in Wells-next-the-sea, near Walsingham.

We try to imagine what kind of job Jesus of Nazareth would do if he lived today. Mark said Jesus was a carpenter. Maybe he was a builder. At my work in a supermarket co-operative in a little village on the coast at Wells-next-the-sea I like to imagine that among all these customers might be builders, carpenters etc. They pop in for their sandwiches. They rush in with their dirty boots to grab a hot cup of coffee because outside it is frosty and windy from the North Sea! Sometimes I think that because we are in Wells-next-the-Sea we have waves of regular customers similar to a timetable.

The first big wave is the mum's waves coming to the shop after dropping their children at the primary school not far from the shop. They are doing a quick shop and grabbing a coffee. We started with 50 workers at the shop but now we have 26. Not everybody is super young and we all struggle a bit with our bad backs or bad knees. All that doesn't help with moving the heavy produce like wine, milk etc. Maybe because we all feel these problems I noticed that my co-workers are quite attentive to help one another. Even when I can't remember where I've put things on the shelves, I can see others keeping an eye on me. They call me "funny granny" when I look around like the sheep lost in the jungle! They don't complain – they take me as I am!

During the summer in this small village by the sea, the population grows by two or three times or more. Obviously, for the local population the money brought in is vital. Sadly, the fishing industry is much reduced but still catch crab and lobster that mostly go to the local hotels.

For the local people it is quite difficult because there are so many holiday homes, and it has raised the house prices greatly. It is very difficult for young families to buy their own homes.



Summer is very busy for us. We are very busy keeping the shelves filled up. It is like, not just waves, but a tsunami! In winter we come back to being a small village marketplace where everybody knows everyone. People take time to stop and exchange the news, gossip etc. For me it a time to touch something of the reality of life, the history of the fishing community and local people.

I would like to say that modern life wants to push us to use technology in the supermarket as elsewhere. Maybe using the app. will make it quicker but please don't forget to smile at the human staff and not the machine.

“The Little Sisters ask to be allowed to live as the leaven in the dough of humanity. They desire to integrate totally with other human beings, while leading a deeply contemplative life, like that of Jesus in the carpenter’s shop at Nazareth and on the highways and byways of his public life”.

*Founder, Little Sister Magdeleine of Jesus in “He Took Me by the Hand”,
1981*

Little Sister Kasia Barbara



How to start a Christian Workplace Group

The editor loves to receive suggestions for Journal content. It is second only to receiving content for the Journal! So, this section is a response to a direct request from a CHRISM member for input on setting up and running a small group in the workplace. Fortunately two organisations have done extensive work on this topic and made their resources freely available online.

Transform Work formed in 2003 with a vision to bring both the opportunities and the resources for Christians to openly and effectively share their faith at work, and influence their profession, commerce and industry with Christian values. They have a step-by-step guide on how to start and run a Christian Workplace Group.

https://www.transformwork.net/Articles/684797/01_Why_Start.aspx

The Theology of Work Project is an independent, international non-profit organisation, dedicated to researching, writing, and distributing materials with a biblical perspective on non-church workplaces. They too have a detailed guide on how to start and run a Faith Based Employee Resource Group (ERG). As the name implies, this group might be on an interfaith basis.

<https://www.theologyofwork.org/how-to-start-a-faith-based-employee-resource-group-erg/>

They also have available some study guides for small group discussion of various topics: ambition; conflict; dealing with a bad boss; work-life balance; influencing when you are not in charge.

<https://www.theologyofwork.org/small-group-studies/topics>

My experience of the Christian staff network at a large university was limited. I admit that I rarely had the time and energy to attend and thankfully others ran it as a welcoming and prayerful support.

I wonder what has been your experience of faith-based staff groups at work?

Climate Justice – what can we do?

Global average temperatures continue to rise along with levels of greenhouse gas emissions. To avoid the worst impacts, international agreement is to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees. But currently, even if all the governments of the world acted on the promises they have made, we would still reach 2.8 degrees. Tragically, those promises are not being fulfilled and the consequences are dire.

“The evidence is everywhere: humanity has unleashed destruction. This must not inspire despair, but action. We can still stop the worst.”

UN Secretary-General António Guterres, July 2023

We can each make a difference whatever our work entails. The change must be real and not of the mere box-ticking, green washing variety. The WWF have some great resources to help. They show how businesses can engage with the issues, and they give examples of success stories. Do look at their material, these two may be especially relevant.

- Let's make our workplace sustainable from WWF.
<https://www.wwf.org.uk/updates/top-20-tips-workplaces-sustainable>
- and
- What your business can do.
<https://www.wwf.org.uk/what-your-business-can-do>



“Listen to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, who suffer the most. The urgent need for interventions can no longer be postponed.”

Pope Francis

Why not subscribe to the electronic version of the journal?

The advantages include the following.

- It will arrive earlier in the month as a pdf, via email.
- It will allow you to access hyperlinked material and sites.
- It will reduce resource use and energy compared with the printed edition.
- It will cut down clutter and the need for storage or recycling.

Just let Sue Cossey, our membership secretary, know if you want to change at sue.cossey@yahoo.co.uk . You could even subscribe to both paper and pdf formats at no extra charge!

International Update

Meeting of German-speaking Working Brothers and Sisters, Mainz

The spring meeting of the German working brothers and sisters at the end of April was again held in the Youth Hostel in Mainz on the banks of the river Rhine. It was a very good weekend, although we were only 15, missing some key people due to ill health. But the three Swiss were present and one Little Sister, KS Anna, who had not been for some time and is now in the Frankfurt Community. With many people absent, there were only two in full time work. Eva, the local Industrial Chaplain, joined us for the Friday evening and was given a slot in which to make introductions and connections.

Our theme was "Perceiving, Embracing and Shaping Diversity". Such a theme of diversity led to very diverse contributions, as you might expect from the range of people there - there was much about diversity of wealth and living standards, especially within cities, and about wars and conflicts. But we did also discuss diversity in the context of religion, gender, etc...

Our discussions were aided and stimulated by the three questions:

- Where and how do I perceive otherness (that of the other person and my own) in my everyday life?
- What does diversity in different fields of life do to me; how do I endure it?
- How do I actively seek out and shape differences? How do I create life in it?

We shared our individual thoughts during the morning and from this emerged some underlying themes. We joined one of the three discussion groups in the afternoon on "Listening and Evaluating". In essence this came down to how far do we go in just recognising diversity, or do we come to a point where we have to make some sort of synthesis.

We also fitted in a session on current issues, including the Israel/Palestine conflict. And the absolute pacifists still struggle with what to do about the continuing conflict in Ukraine.

The worship was led by the Swiss - gentle and full of space. One morning prayer on the subject of death, used two sides of the same newspaper sheet: the 7 aid workers killed in Gaza, and the attack on a baker's shop in Ukraine. We kept returning to three songs for peace - one Jewish, one Palestinian, and the third from Azerbaijan. Something I would recommend for CHRISM.

On Sunday we did the usual International Reports - with many questions to me about Rwanda, and elections. (What a change in three months!)

We also discussed the plans for the International Conference at Herzogenrath in the autumn. The Germans have decided to have their own meeting just two weeks after this, but it is hoped that some of them will join the International event on the Saturday evening.

The German meetings in Mainz for next year are proposed for:
21 - 23 Feb 2025
14 - 16 Nov 2025

While in Germany I pursued other Worker Priest connections. In Berlin I celebrated May Day in a street festival with the political party, Die Linke, and I met - completely by chance - two elderly ladies whom

knew personally most of my Berlin Worker Priest contacts - we agreed "Berlin is a small village"! I also went out to Belzig to visit Ruth, one of the German Group, at home for a lunch "in the DDR".

My main reason for going to Berlin was for a birthday party for Anke and Hugh Williamson - the son of Tony Williamson, one of "Britain's First Worker Priests".* I met again several people whom Hugh Lee and I had first encountered at Tony's funeral.

During the evening I was introduced to a Jewish family who had come over from Israel for the weekend. The grandfather of this family lived in the house where Hugh and his wife now live - until he and his family fled on Kristallnacht 1938. I went to visit them again on the Sunday as part of a weekend of open houses. The grandfather had visited them in 2018 for the first time in 80 years. You can read about this moving event on Hugh's blog. <https://www.hughwilliamson.org/new-blog/2018/6/10/the-ex-tenant> It brought us back to the pain and reality of the Israel/Palestine conflict.

* Britain's First Worker-priests: Radical Ministry in a Post-war Setting by John Mantle, 2000, tells the history and reality of this first group in the UK.

Invitation to the European Conference in the Tradition of the Worker Priests

We have now received the invitation letter to the International Conference in the Autumn, so we again invite anyone interested to attend. We included some details in the April edition of Ministers-at-Work. The conference will take place:

25th - 27th October 2024 at Nell-Breuning Haus, Herzogenrath, near to Aachen, Germany.

The theme has been confirmed through the questions:

- Members of a community of daily life and destiny, what are we experiencing currently?
- How do we experience sharing daily life with others, in the present (political) situation?

The weekend runs from Friday evening dinner until Sunday lunch, but it will be possible to stay additional nights to have the opportunity to visit Aachen. The estimated cost is currently €190, but with various donations it is expected to reduce below €150.

All participants are asked to prepare an individual half-page on their situation and the questions posed (in our own language and translated into French using Google) - by the 15th September.

The deadline for registrations is the 1st September. If you would like a registration form, please contact Margaret Trivasse or Phil Aspinall. Do come and join us.

After dinner on Friday, we shall have a short session covering the organisation of the weekend. Saturday starts with prayer led by "The Iberian Peninsula" leading into the chance for everyone to make their own contribution on the theme and papers - this will continue in small

groups. After the midday pause, we shall have a bible study, also in groups, and then a visit to explore the situation of refugees around Aachen, which sits at the borders of Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany.

The Eucharist will lead into a buffet dinner - we are, as always, encouraged to bring specialities from our own countries to share. It is hoped two Belgians, who have been long-standing members of the network, will join us, along with other members of the German group. The Bishop of Aachen has also been invited to come to meet people. Sunday morning begins with prayer led by the French and then the usual news from each country/region represented. We are asked for three points - if you have any suggestions, please let us know.

Herzogenrath can be reached easily by train via Brussels and Aachen; and by plane through Dusseldorf or Maastricht.

If you would like more information, or a full copy of the programme, please contact Phil philaspinall840@gmail.com or Margaret margtriv@yahoo.co.uk

God in the Mass on Sunday. God in the mess on Monday.

Felicity Smith

MSE as Prophet – CHRISM conference



We gathered for our CHRISM conference Friday 11- Sunday 14 July in Manchester at Luther King House. Our theme was the role of prophecy in ministry in secular employment.

On Saturday morning the CHRISM AGM took place as a hybrid meeting, held in person and via ZOOM. Peter Selby continues as our Presiding Moderator and Simon Cocks was elected as Incoming Moderator. He becomes Presiding Moderator in July 2025. CHRISM

membership stands at 82 (4 higher than last year), including 2 overseas members.

We were then joined by Professor Peter Scott, Samuel Ferguson Professor of Applied Theology & Director of the Lincoln Theological Institute, at The University of Manchester. Peter led us in an engaging and wide ranging discussion including the different understandings of MSE in the world, the church and among those who identify as MSE. We mused on the various meanings of “secular” too, asking how does God speak from and into our secular environment?

Prophecy:

- Identify unjust structures
- Challenge them
- Offer an alternative reality

We were reminded of the prophets calling to be agents of change, speaking truth to power, even being messengers of apocalypse, but also influencing leaders and working with them. Perhaps we can encompass both in our ministry of presence and accompanying, helping to shape an environment where people can flourish.

We were later joined by the Rt. Revd. Julie Conalty, Bishop of Birkenhead in Chester Diocese. Her background was as a manager of a homeless shelter, then as a social worker in the rehabilitation of offenders. After ordination she served for 10 years as a self-supporting minister. In 2022 she was appointed deputy lead bishop for safeguarding in the Church of England. As she commented, this is not a post where she can expect to be liked and in a recent BBC Radio 4 interview said, “culturally we are resistant as a church to accountability, to criticism.” We were reminded of the prophet

Amos, who was a shepherd and dresser of sycamore trees (we were interested to understand what that job entailed)! He seemed to us to be a minister in secular employment! Being outside the structure allowed him to speak truth to power. We reflected on how, not being dependent on the church for pension, home or career advancement, can make it easier for us to be prophetic within the church. We shared examples of our prophetic role in the workplace. These ranged across calling out management for not providing appropriate support for colleagues with disabilities, and risk management - warning what might happen if action is not taken to avert problems. We agreed that none of the biblical prophets had a comfortable time. Building relationships and working together with management and colleagues may resolve problems and find fruitful ways forward. But the time may not be right, and we may have to follow Elijah's example in I Kings 9 and wait in a figurative cave until God makes God's self known. Prophets seemed often to be loners, misfits, called by God but not usually accepted by those to whom they were sent. Many prophets were to be found not in the palaces and the Temple but among the people. We were challenged to reflect:

- Can we help people to, recognise God where they are? Can we help them discover the burning bush, the holy ground where they are?
- Can we be like John the Baptist and point folk to Jesus?
- Can we help people, whatever their situation, to be a blessing to others?
- Can CHRISM itself have a role in prophecy?

Ministry in Secular Employment – reaching the parts other ministries don't reach!

We were encouraged to make a visit in prophetic mode to nearby parts of Manchester, although having an afternoon snooze was another option. On our visits we gathered general impressions and looked for what might offend the righteousness of God, any message we might want to give to that community and any signs of hope.



Manchester Urban Diggers, Community Garden

Over tea we discussed our experiences. In the community garden we could see a social enterprise already providing great services locally and with potential for developing further but constantly struggling to raise funding for ongoing costs. Along the main road, “curry mile” was a bustling row of shops and restaurants. Here was a very diverse community from many parts of the world living apparently harmoniously and thriving although we wondered about pay levels for the many food delivery cyclists. In a guided visit to A & E at the Manchester Royal Infirmary, our group were impressed at how the unit has coped with an 11% increase in patient numbers over the last 12 months. The manager was positive about the future but we noted

the long hours staff worked and lack of provision of healthy foods for them.

In a final rousing hymn at our Sunday Eucharist we sang

“Anoint us prophets! Teach us your intent:
To human need, our quickened hearts awake;
Fill us with power, our lips make eloquent
For righteousness that shall all evil break.”
Amen to that!

Rebecca Craven





The courtyard of Luther King House

BOOK REVIEW of *I, Julian* by Claire Gilbert

A novel about Julian of Norwich may not seem the most obvious choice for MSE reading! Indeed, any connection is rather tenuous. However, the book is a very good read and thought-provoking.

Told from the perspective of Julian, it places her firmly in context, providing her with some background, some of which is rooted in historical fact. The author paints a vivid picture of the medieval world, particularly at a time of plague. Julian's sense of vocation is traced through several phases before she becomes an anchorite, being walled into a cell ten or twelve paces across at angles to the church. Her description of her evolving experiences of the nature of God and the Crucifixion, later written down in the Revelations of Divine Love, is moving and a cause for reflection.

The three practices of an anchorite were contemplative prayer, intercession and counsel. Julian's cell had a window on to the street, in the heart of the town, and she was in constant demand for advice. In other words, although she was very much enclosed, she also was involved in the life of the world of work.

The cell's position, at angles to the church, mirrored symbolically Julian's attitude to the Church, which was faithful and yet questioning, perhaps like many of us. Also portrayed in the book is a group of lay sisters with whom Julian is described as staying on her vocational journey. Based in historical fact, these women were very much in the worker priest tradition, living in community amongst the people and supporting themselves through manual work.

The threefold commission of the anchorite is not dissimilar to our own: we are engaged with those in our environments; we pray for those whom we encounter; and we need spiritual refreshment in order to carry out our own calling.

Margaret Trivasse

Theology of Work Bible Commentary

Among the many Bible commentaries available these days it is pleasing to see that there is one specifically addressing the Theology of Work, and it is online and free to use, at

<https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/theology-of-work/toc/>

Produced by the US-based Theology of Work Project, it explores what the Bible says about faith and work, book by book through the Bible. Described by Bible Gateway as a robust commentary which has been vetted by a team of scholars and practitioners committed to a creating a comprehensive, biblically accurate theology of work. It is available in hard copy or e-book from Google Books, and can also be accessed at <https://www.theologyofwork.org/resources/the-theology-of-work-bible-commentary> .

Robert Fox

Praying for the world of work

In 2016 CHRISM published a Prayer Diary for People at Work that can be accessed on the CHRISM website under Resources and CHRISM papers at <https://chrism.org.uk/page25.html> There are lots of other treasures among the resources too.

Each day of each month has an occupation listed as a focus for prayer and reflection. There are many ways to use the diary. It is offered in the hope that it will generate interest, prayer, enthusiasm and thanksgiving for the glorious web of work in which we and our colleagues engage each day. It also reminds us of those whose work exposes them to risks, abuse and exploitation.

For those who are new to it, here is the prayer list for August:

- 1 Commentator
- 2 Pest Control Operator
- 3 Engraver
- 4 Security Guard
- 5 Bailiff
- 6 Home Help
- 7 Welder
- 8 Commissionaire
- 9 Photographer
- 10 Entertainer
- 11 Sewage Worker
- 12 Baker
- 13 Riding Instructor
- 14 Welfare Worker
- 15 Community Worker
- 16 Physiotherapist
- 17 Entrepreneur
- 18 Shipbuilder
- 19 Bank Staff
- 20 Domestic staff
- 21 Wheel Clamper
- 22 Computer Analyst, Programmer
- 23 Piano Tuner
- 24 Environmental Health Officer
- 25 Shipping Clerk
- 26 Banksman (person who helps road or rail vehicles or cranes to manoeuvre safely)
- 27 Human Resources Staff
- 28 Window Cleaner
- 29 Computer Engineer
- 30 Pilot
- 31 Estate Agent



Image by Erfin Ekarana at <https://www.pexels.com>

God the Creator, bless me in the things that I do today.
God the Spirit, guide me in the things that I think and plan today.
God the Redeemer, forgive and make good the things that I might
spoil today.

In all my work may I find you with me,
and look to the day when all things will be made new
in what you have yet to create in your wisdom and boundless love.

Industrial Christian Fellowship Prayer

Dates for your diary

25 - 27 October 2024: European Conference in the Tradition of the Worker Priests, at Nell-Breuning Haus, Herzogenrath, near to Aachen, Germany

See the Invitation at page 14 for further details.

Saturday 9 November 10:00am.

Wisdom Lab: Better Conversations The Use and Abuse of Power

LICC, St Peter's Vere Street, London, W1G 0DQ

Tailored for 18–35s but open to all, this in-person gathering will give you a safe space to explore what you think, wrestle with tricky topics, and consider what it all means for the way you live today.

<https://licc.org.uk/events/wisdom-lab-better-conversations-the-use-and-abuse-of-power/>

And, most importantly.....



Save the date! & spread the word!

**14-16 February 2025, Reflective Weekend, Shallowford,
Staffordshire ST15 0NZ**

<https://www.shallowfordhouse.org/about/>

Enjoy a refreshing and relaxing weekend retreat at Shallowford House, set within 9 acres of secluded gardens, woodland and meadows in the Staffordshire countryside. Located just 3 miles from the M6 (Junction 14), Shallowford is easily accessible from all parts of the country.

CHRISM Theology Discussion Group - Future Meetings

This Discussion Group, which is open to all CHRISM members, provides an online forum where we can reflect on and discuss the theological aspects of our work. We meet monthly by Zoom for an hour and a half. Recent topics have included: The Importance of our Work to God and Us, The Idea of Rest, What is Work?, Justice at Work, The Kingdom at Work Project, Eternal Life, Christian Perspectives on Conflict in the Workplace, Organisational values - Help or hindrance to ministry in the workplace?, Is it OK to be ambitious?, Who is Jesus?, and Neighbourliness at Work.

If you are interested in joining the Theology Discussion Group, please email me at rev.julian.e.blakemore@gmail.com and I will add you to the invitation list so that you receive Zoom links for future meetings.

We look forward to welcoming you.

Revd Julian Blakemore

CHRISM is on Facebook, 'Ministers at Work':

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/129656640430436/>

and LinkedIn, at:

<https://www.linkedin.com/groups?home=&gid=3756477>

CHRISM is the National Association of CHRistians In Secular Ministry and is for all

Christians who see their secular employment as their primary Christian ministry, and for those who support that vision. To further this aim, CHRISM publishes a quarterly Journal, releases occasional papers and organises an annual retreat. Conferences are held regularly and worldwide links pursued.

CHRISM welcomes members, both lay and ordained, from all Christian denominations, encourages them to be active within their own faith communities and to champion ministry in and through secular employment.

If you would like confidential support as an MSE, please contact any member of the Committee. **Further information may be obtained from the Secretary or the Journal Editor.**

Membership Secretary

Sue Cossey | Bye Mead, Emerson's Green, Bristol BS16 7DL
Retired Insurance underwriter sue.cossey@yahoo.co.uk
0117 957 4267

Submissions for the Journal should be sent to:

Journal Editor, Rebecca Craven, 201 Thornton Rd, Manchester
M14 7NS rebeccacraven@gmail.com

Visit the **CHRISM** website: www.chrism.org.uk

Chrism Committee Members:

Presiding moderator

Peter Selby peter@theselbys.org 07721 539081

Consultant physician

Incoming moderator

Simon Cocks 51 Melrose Ave. Sutton Coldfield, B73 6NS
Senior business systems analyst revd.simon@outlook.com 07773 329875

Outgoing Moderator

Nicky von Benzon 24 Little Penny Rope, Pershore, WR10 1 QN
nicky5319@outlook.com 07503 002220

Hugh Lee (Emeritus)

Energy Economist 64 Observatory Street, Oxford, OX2 6EP

hugh.lee@btinternet.com

Secretary

Margaret Trivasse 114 Valley Mill Lane, Bury, BL9 9BY
Counsellor margtriv@yahoo.co.uk 07796 366220

Treasurer

Rob Fox 51 St Ronan's Drive, Seaton Sluice, Whitley Bay,
Northumberland, NE26 4JW rob.fox36@gmail.com

Journal Editor

Rebecca Craven 201 Thornton Rd. Manchester M14 7NS
Activist/volunteer rebeccacraven@gmail.com

Committee Members

Lyn Page 28 King's Lynn Rd, Hunstanton, Norfolk, PE36 5HT
Retired IT lyn.page@willow-bank.co.uk 07497195257

Ali Creasey

IT project manager totleyassociate@gmail.com 07496 451687

Julian Blakemore

Non-exec. board 62 Lomond Way, Stevenage, Herts, SG1 6BT
- finance and investment rev.julian.e.blakemore@gmail.com 07889431695

Web Master

Martin Dryden Mont Ube House, St Clement, Jersey, JE2 6QT
Non-Executive-Director drydenmj@outlook.com

Patron **The Most Revd and Rt Hon Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury**