

Greetings.

It is a privilege to be able to write for the magazine as I come as minister to join the fellowship at Central Church. For all of us, the pace of change has been fast because of the circumstances and so we find ourselves at the start of a journey together. I thought it would be helpful to say a little about myself by way of introduction but I am sure there will be many opportunities for us to talk in different settings over the coming months.

My journey in ministry hasn't been a conventional one but I hope that has brought some experience which helps me to bring a particular perspective to my work. I started work as a social worker in East London back in 1981 and worked for a number of London Boroughs mainly undertaking family work and mental health support. In 1989 I joined the charity Barnardo's as their policy officer helping shape how issues affecting children were responded to and for two years I was seconded to the Department of Health as a Social Services inspector which was a fascinating insight. I had trained as a local preacher and knew that I felt a pull towards ministry but I also felt called to the work I was doing. It was the late David Gamble who opened up the possibility of a role that combined both, which has been a feature of my ministry so far.

In 1998 I moved to Bristol to take up post as Assistant Director for Barnardo's in the South West and also to undertake ministerial training and I was ordained in 2003. While developing the work for Barnardo's I also looked after three different churches in Bristol over time and I enjoyed the challenge of relating faith, work, church and ministry together. I eventually left Barnardo's to take up a post of Director of a small ecumenical charity in Bristol called ISR which worked across the churches in the city to promote industrial chaplaincy, community engagement and social action. I stayed there for five years before deciding to enter full time ministry and moved to Newton Abbot in 2013.

I have a strong belief that the Church has a unique opportunity ahead of it in re shaping itself but first we have to be prepared to ask ourselves what we are really here for and to become excited about the possibilities that will open up for us when we do that. A phrase that you will undoubtedly hear me use is that we are called to be an outward focused community of disciples centered around the Gospel.

On a personal and family note, I am now sadly separated from my wife though am the proud father of two grown up daughters who are making their way in the world. Some of you have already met my personal sidekick Archie who is a two year old Cockapoo dog who loves meeting new people and likes nothing better than being given attention. I have a love of music of all sorts but my mid life crisis was taking up the guitar which I play quite badly, though I did play for a short while with a rock group which was great fun.

I am looking forward to beginning our journey together and seeking ways that we can live out the Gospel and I shall be coming to talk to as many of you as I can to learn about life at Central and the hopes and dreams for the future.

I would also like to take this opportunity to say thank you to the stewards and all those who have worked hard to welcome me and help me settle in which has been greatly appreciated.

The Bible reminds us that we are blessed so that we can be a blessing to others and in being and doing that together we will grow in love and faith.

Peace and blessings,

Jon