



Now it's singing not dancing for Daniel

Despite recent successful appearances on the hit BBC1 TV show **Strictly Come Dancing**, world-famous Irish singer **Daniel O'Donnell** will be sticking to his country, folk and Gospel music when he visits **Norwich** next year. **Keith Morris** reports.

In October, popular entertainer Daniel (53), turned his hand to dancing, accepting an invitation to appear on the BBC cult show **Strictly** where he was teamed up with Russian dancer Kristina Rihanoff.

Despite being the third celebrity voted off the show, Daniel said he enjoyed the experience: "I love **Strictly**, but it's very traumatic waiting to know your fate. Standing at the top of the stairs waiting for the **Strictly** results to come through is the worst feeling in the world. Even if it's not you that's leaving it's going to be one of your friends, and that's just as difficult."

Kristina, his dancing partner, said: "You were such a joy to work with; you are the most wonderful guy, always there with a smile, always ready to learn. It was an absolutely wonderful experience for me."

After 30 years in the music business, Daniel still sells out arenas around the world and has an army of fans whose fierce loyalty rivals that of any of the top boy bands out there.

The Irish crooner has sold over ten million records and in 2012 became the only recording artist to have had a different album in the UK charts each year for 25 consecutive years.

But Daniel is philosophical when it comes to his fame, and credits his Christian faith with keeping his feet firmly on the ground.

"It's easy to do what we do, especially if you're in the public eye and think you're so powerful that you don't need anything," he says. "But my faith has kept me grounded – the realisation that I'm blessed to be given all this."

"For me, being a Christian is about how we relate to other people around us. A lot of people believe in the Christian way – even those who don't believe – but it's about realising that after this life there's so much more. We have to believe that. We don't have any concept of what that is but when we realise that what we have here is nothing in comparison to what comes next – that's powerful."

"I've never sung to make money. I sing because I love it and the money is just a by-product of what I do. My biggest payment is being on the stage and that is a big part of the secret of my success. If it all ended tomorrow, I couldn't say there is anything the world could have offered me that is better than what I have."

Born in Kinclassagh, a small rural town in Donegal, Ireland, Daniel's first taste of music was in his local church where he sang in the choir.



Daniel O'Donnell, with Kristina Rihanoff on **Strictly Come Dancing** which runs until December 19. Picture courtesy of BBC.

"I always feel a real closeness to people in church and Christmas Eve in the chapel was something special," he explains. "Religious occasions like First Communion and Confirmation were among the highlights of my childhood years."

But it wasn't until his late teenage years when it became clear that singing was Daniel's passion. Then, at the age of 21, he joined his sister, Margaret, who had made a name for herself in Ireland as a singer.

A year later Daniel had produced his debut record, which was quickly followed by his first show and his career went from strength to strength and his fan base grew with it.

"There are no words to describe the feelings

that I get from an audience when I perform on stage," he says. "It is heaven on earth to me. Without the people who follow me I would not have this life. They say that when you're doing a job that you love, you never work a day in your life. Well, that is certainly the case with me. I have never worked since I became an entertainer."

Daniel was forced to cancel two previous concerts at the Norwich's Theatre Royal at the last-minute after his father-in-law had been involved in a serious accident at his Tenerife home and he flew out to be with him and wife Majella. He will now be appearing in Norwich in September 2016.

Article extracts from www.newlife.co.uk



Norwich faith social action has huge impact

■ The social action work of churches and faith groups across Norwich is having a huge positive local impact according to the results of a recently published survey.

The Cinnamon Faith Action Audit, conducted earlier this year, received responses from 43 Norwich-based faith groups.

Between them these groups reported running 388 social action projects for the benefit of 85,320 people outside of their own membership group, during 2014.

This work was done by 215 paid staff and 3,921 volunteers, putting in a staggering 810,000 hours of work and, using the Living Wage rate of £7.85 an hour plus some additional resources, the financial value of this project work is around £6.7 million.

One of the respondents was Norwich Foodbank, which last year provided 9,198 three-day emergency food parcels to people in genuine need, along with refreshments, listening ears and referrals to other agencies.

Phil Thorne, local co-ordinator of the survey and pastor at Alive Church in Norwich, said: "The results celebrate the immense variety of work impacting groups of all ages and situations from all faiths and none and will increase the working relationships with our local authorities."

Danny Doran-Smith, Chair of Norwich churches group Transforming Norwich, which has backed the survey, said: "Local churches and other faith groups in Norwich work with families, provide debt advice, coach people back into work, offer emergency food parcels and provide a safe place to belong and build friendships."

"These groups are uniquely positioned to support those in most need on multiple levels and we believe that they should be celebrated and encouraged."

"The results of the survey show that local churches and other faith groups in Norwich work with a vast cross-section of beneficiaries and gives an insight into the true breadth, value and impact they have on all sections of the community."

Matt Bird Cinnamon Network founder, said: "The purpose of the audit was to provide evidence for both the social impact and the economic value of all that faith groups do in communities across the UK. We hope that the evidence provided will inspire a greater confidence that faith and faith-based social action is a force for good in our society."

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When winter meets its death - in Narnia

■ When we first encounter it, C.S. Lewis' magical land of Narnia is in the grip of the White Witch. She opposes Aslan and all that is good and has cast a spell on Narnia so that it is always winter but never Christmas.

For me, winters can be long and cold but at least the anticipation of the joy and warmth of Christmas makes it easier to endure. But imagine a land where there is no Christmas! Narnia was that land - a world that was in slavery to the curse of the White Witch, a world that was not as it should be and a world that was awaiting restoration.

Of course, as the plot in The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe unfolds, we discover that only Aslan, the true king of Narnia, can defeat the White Witch and break the spell:

Wrong will be right, when Aslan comes in sight,

At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more,

When he bares his teeth, winter meets its death,



**Pastor
Dominic
De Souza,
tlcNorwich**

And when he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again.

And thankfully the old prophecy does come true: Aslan takes his role as rightful king and Christmas finally comes to Narnia.

For Christians such as C.S. Lewis, the fictional story of Narnia mirrors the actual story of our world. Though God created our world good, the Bible explains the consequences of our wrong choices: the world – and indeed we human beings – are not as we should be.

With Aslan representing Jesus Christ and the White Witch being a picture of Satan, we are prisoners of sin who need to be rescued

from the curse.

And this really is the true message of Christmas, for just as Aslan broke the curse of the White Witch, so Jesus came as a human child the very first Christmas to free us from slavery and the grip of Satan. This is why the Bible calls Jesus the Saviour.

Sometimes we can feel as if we are stuck in a perpetual winter with no Christmas – our lives become cold, dark, gloomy and depressing. We feel as if there is no hope, that there is no way out, that nothing will ever change.

But the great news is that Christmas did come and God's light and warmth broke into our dark cold. What is broken can therefore be fixed. There is hope for the hopeless. In Jesus Christ the winter of our lives meets its death. And for those who accept Him, the long, dark spell of winter is not only broken but the newness of spring arrives in all its beauty.

Christmas has come! Don't allow yourself to go through another winter without experiencing the true meaning of Christmas!

Ruth is on the ball as sports minister

A Norwich church has appointed former basketball player, **Ruth Graveling**, as its new sports minister to help people develop their love of sport, alongside a faith in God. **Helen Baldry** reports.

Having gained experience in youth work and sports coaching, Ruth, aged 33, has returned to her Norfolk roots into full-time sports ministry at St Thomas' church in Norwich.

Ruth grew up in Cromer, she has always been sporty and played basketball to a high level. "I wanted to make it big in sport," she said. "I wanted to make it to the Olympics or to play for my country. When I didn't get that far I thought 'what should I do?'"

What Ruth did was explore her appetite for Christian ministry by taking a year out in Coventry with Youth For Christ as a basketball worker.

Her first task was to set up a youth Alpha course, to which she invited a few local teenagers. After they had left, she discovered her wallet and keys had been

stolen. She said: "That was one of the first times in my life when I didn't know what to do. So I went back to God and spent time in prayer. I learnt through that and other experiences to trust in God."

Ruth discovered she had a knack for connecting people through sport and telling them about Jesus. She went on to become a sports minister in Gloucestershire working with disengaged young people.

She said: "They weren't interested in Jesus at all but were massively sporty."

Ruth found that a shared love of sport enabled her to talk to people about God. During this time she saw many lives transformed – several of the young people became Christians and many became qualified sports coaches.

Now back in Norfolk, working for St Thomas' Church in Norwich, Ruth is at the helm of The Sports Factory, a church project which runs regular sporting activities, holiday clubs and coaching academies.

Ruth has already made progress; over 450 people attended a rugby world cup event, 12 people have started their academy training and over 40 children attended the first half term holiday club.



Ruth Graveling, new sports minister at St Thomas Norwich.



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Leon McKenzie, right, speaking at Soul Church in Norwich with senior pastor Jon Norman.

Leon talks about faith and football

Leon told a 480-strong audience of making his professional debut for Crystal Palace at the age of 17 as a YTS trainee and the highlights of his Norwich City career - scoring twice on his debut in a derby game against Ipswich Town at Portman Road and the winner against Manchester United.

"It was a dream debut come true," said Leon. "I fell in love with the club and played with my heart - what a fantastic time I had at Norwich."

He also revealed that he used to pray before every game. "I used to take my Bible into the changing room and sit in the corner and just pray - not that I would score lots of goals and we would win, but that I would not get hurt and I would just go out and have fun," said Leon.

"I was very privileged to play professional football and earned fantastic money. But if you are not careful you can lose your identity and yourself along the way," he said.

Retiring from football in 2013, he followed his father Clinton McKenzie and uncle Duke McKenzie into the boxing ring.

Earlier this year, Leon won his first boxing title by beating Ivan Stupalo to take the international super-middleweight masters belt.

But the biggest fight of Leon's life has been with depression, which he wrote about in his 2012 autobiography, *My Fight With Life*, which led to a suicide

Former Norwich City striker, and now masters boxing champion, Leon McKenzie talked about his sporting career, his battle with depression and his faith in God at Soul Church in Norwich recently. Keith Morris reports.

attempt while playing for Charlton.

"Towards the end of my career I lost my way and had injuries - it was a nightmare. When I went to Charlton, I was not playing and I had serious depression. I pulled a hamstring. I called my mum after training that day and just burst into tears. For about a month I had just wanted out and to end it all.

"I had collected about 60 pills sleeping pills and other tablets and took them all, one after the other with a bottle of Jack Daniels. I don't know why but I called my dad. He rushed around and burst into the hotel room and I just collapsed in his arms. I woke up next day in hospital."

In February 2012, Leon's life hit another low when he was jailed for six months for trying to avoid speeding

convictions.

"When the guard shut the cell door, the reality hit me in the face and I burst into tears. When things are taken away from you it really defines your character," said Leon.

Leon became a born-again Christian at the age of 20 and was baptized a year later, but he admitted he often struggles with his faith, while retaining a belief in God.

"I believe God sometimes lets things happen in your life so that you can really appreciate where you are and what you have," he said.

"Some days when I open my Bible I get it and some days I don't. If I am honest, sometimes the whole religion thing gets on my nerves. I don't go to church every Sunday or pray every day, but I know my heart and I know God sees that."

Leon has been married and divorced twice, and has five children, whom he clearly adores.

"Sometimes I come home and sit there by myself and I see all memorabilia and man of the match award and the boxing belt and I can still feel alone," said Leon. "I appreciate them but they don't really mean anything - I would much rather see my kids running about me any day. But that is down to my issues and my demons."

"All I can do is try to correct certain things that have happened in the past and move forward with faith and try and be a better Leon McKenzie."

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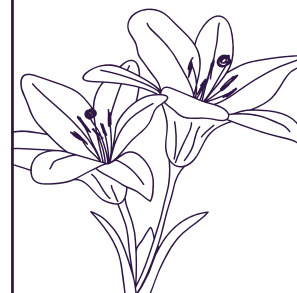
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Sandhurst star student and financial high-flier, **Justyn Rees Larcombe**, lost his wife, his family, £750,000 and his Sword of Honour to a crippling online gambling addiction, a **Norwich** audience has heard. **Mike Wiltshire** reports.



Justyn with wife Emma.

Justyn lost family, job and £750,000

Justyn had it all - around his beautiful home were the mementoes of success - the Sword of Honour awarded by the Queen when he left Sandhurst; the silver photo frames with the pictures of his much-loved wife and family; the rooms full of the rewards of a career in the City of London.

But Justyn had a parallel life: he gambled. The gambling addiction "seemed to come from nowhere". But gradually, from the age of 44, he allowed it to take over everything, getting through a staggering £750,000 - some his own money, some his wife's.

When the credit crunch came he lost his job, his wife left him, taking his

sons. Soon, the Porsche and Mercedes cars were gone - and anything that could be sold. Then he just gambled away again.

Justyn's inspirational personal story of recovery provides hope for many who struggle with addictive behaviour issues - there are an estimated 450,000 compulsive gamblers in the UK.

Justyn is the son of well-known Christian writer and speaker, Jennifer Rees Larcombe. He had Christian values from the day when, as a child in the garden - his big sister led him to faith in Christ.

Later, at university, and in the Army, he did very well, remembering a promise in the Bible where God says: "Those who honour Me, I will honour, and those that despise Me will be humbled." (1 Samuel 2:30).

Then, during a highly successful career in financial services, Justyn, who loved sports, found himself with money and time on his hands and made an innocent sports-related bet.

"I was looking for alternative excitement, away from God." But one bet led to another . . . and the secret losses began to pile up as the stakes increased. Family relationships suffered badly - along with a terrible sense of shame as he "began to lose almost everything."

Eventually, he found himself alone, without hope, selling everything and not eating. At his lowest point, he fell on his knees in tears and confessed that it was pride that had led to his downfall. But he knew he was forgiven - and on a tough road to freedom from addiction.

The loss of trust has been difficult to repair, but today Justyn is a changed man, vowing to never gamble again.

"Through a miracle, I'm now back with my wife," he says. "I have nothing like the income I once had, but my life is so much richer. I've discovered that money isn't important - people and relationships are."

"I have a regular walk with God and

my faith is everything to me - my rock and my foundation. I feel so very happy to have been given another chance to be a proper father and a husband.

"I intend to live one day at a time in all its fullness. Having spent so long taking, I now love nothing better than giving. Giving my time and my energy to others and my trust is in Christ - not the spin of a roulette wheel!"

A keen endurance swimmer and fund-raiser, Justyn successfully swam the English Channel solo in 2014 to raise awareness of Hemiplegia, a condition his seven-year-old son Matthew has suffered from birth. Justyn is married to Emma and they have three sons: Matthew, Oscar 4 and Harry, 14.

It was a painful experience writing his story, called "Tails I Lose" - as he 'relieved' with tears the misery of his gambling addiction. "I hope people who read my story will gain a better understanding about addictions in general which can affect us all if we let down our guard," he said. "But, ultimately I want people to know there is hope, healing and restoration through Christ."

In a review of Justyn's book, General The Lord Sir Richard Dannatt, former head of the British Army, said: "This is a most compelling account of the ups and downs of life, written with deep passion and total honesty."

■ Justyn was speaking at a VIP Christmas dinner in Norwich, arranged by the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship at the Brook Hotel.


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UK's most dangerous is turned to tears

Once known as one of the most dangerous prisoners in the UK, **Shane Taylor** went on a 17-year rampage of violence, theft and drugs until a dramatic encounter turned him to tears and showed him God was real. **Sandie Shirley** reports.

At the age of 19, Shane was arrested after two attempted murders. Then, after a number of incidents at HMP Holme House, near Middlesbrough, he was put in segregation. The Home Office came to know him as one of the six most dangerous prisoners in the country.

"In prison I went wild. I lost hope, I lost love and I did not care if I got 'life' since I lost all my inhibitions. But now I know God is real and he can change your life," Shane told an Alpha supper hosted by Christ Community Church in Attleborough, a couple of weeks ago.

Today he is a doting father with a strong Christian faith who works with ex-offenders. "I meet them at the prison gates, mentor them and bring God into their lives because I know God is going to change them, he changed me," he said.

As a teenager he took on society and authority after he was bullied at school. "I was determined no-one would pick on me again," Shane told the packed audience during the Alpha course, which explores Christianity.

"I would steal anything in my path," said Shane. He was soon mixing with the wrong crowd and he made daring daylight burglaries while the occupants were at home.

His role model was an uncle who had a reputation for fighting. "I carried a full set of knives around my waist. When I pulled out a knife I intended to hurt someone.

"I did not have any morals. I became a feared drug dealer. Life was about my reputation, I showed everyone that they should not cross me."

Soon he was on the run for kidnapping and attempted murder. After landing in gaol he fought the system, rebelling with violent attacks on inmates and stabbing two prison officers



Shane Taylor, whose life was touched by God.

with broken glass when he could not use the gym, causing a riot.

Shane was moved to a variety of maximum security prisons. "They were full of mafia hit men and serial killers," he says. There were long stretches of segregation and six or seven officers used riot shields as they opened his cell door, he explains.

When Shane moved to Parkhurst Prison on the Isle of Wight he met a lifer who threw down the faith gauntlet. "Jesus loves you, open your heart," he said. "I thought he was mad but I could not forget him telling me that he had been in prison for years and would never be released but he was free."

After moving to another prison, Shane responded to an Alpha invite because of the biscuits and debates.

Eventually he made a desperate plea to God. "If you are real come into my life - I hate who I

am; I hate who I have become."

Suddenly Shane could not stop sobbing. "I could feel a weight being lifted from me. In a split second I knew God was real and Jesus had touched me.

"We all deserve to go to hell. According to the Bible all of us are sinful and miss the mark. That is why the Bible is called the Good News - if you accept Jesus Christ you go to heaven."

Weeks later, Shane's changed behaviour meant a trusted job with the prison chaplaincy instead of permanent segregation. Almost a year after that Alpha day he was freed from prison.

"God has spoken to me and done things that only he could have done for me. I am now married with four beautiful children and I do Bible studies at night. He has changed the path of my family and changed the next generation," says Shane who tells prison inmates about the Saviour who gave him new life and purpose.

YMCA launches Christmas appeal

■ YMCA Norfolk has launched a Home for Christmas campaign which aims to help ensure that no young person in Norfolk has to sleep on the street, in cars or on friends' floors this Christmas.

This Christmas, YMCA Norfolk will provide a safe home for over 260 homeless young people and support them towards a brighter future - people like 21-year-old Leah Jenkinson from Norwich. Last September, Leah moved into YMCA supported lodgings after a relationship breakdown with her family.

"In the run-up to Christmas I was not looking forward to it and thought I would be lonely and sad," she said.

"But things changed for me, my supported lodgings providers gave me a Christmas I couldn't have dreamed of.

"At first I was nervous about Christmas as I didn't want to intrude, but my



Leah Jenkinson.

providers welcomed me into their family traditions. I got to spend the day playing games and enjoying myself. They showed me what a Christmas could be like and helped me make the best of the situation I was in. We all cooked together and shared the day, I was included in every aspect.

"I never thought I would be included in someone else's Christmas and the fact that I was will stay with me forever," said Leah.

YMCA Norfolk chief executive, Tim Sweeting, said: "There are children and young people out there who are sleeping on the streets, in cars, or on a series of friends' floors until they run out of options.

"They have no safe base from which to build a life for themselves. So we are encouraging the local community to join us in making sure no child or young person experiences the instability and fear of having no place to call home."

To support someone like Leah this Christmas and give them hope for the future, text YMCA15 and your chosen donation amount to 70070.

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Val is honoured with MBE

■ Christian social action pioneer Valerie Dodsworth (pictured right) received her MBE from Richard Jewson, Lord Lieutenant of Norfolk, on behalf of the Queen, at a private investiture ceremony at Keswick near Norwich a few weeks ago.

Val was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire for services to homeless people and to the community in Norwich. She has worked in prison, in the after-care of homeless offenders and for the Probation Service.

After retirement, Val became a member of the chaplaincy team at Norwich Prison and became increasingly concerned about the welfare of prisoners after their release. She decided to set up a home for the homeless, including ex-offenders, called the House of Genesis. Initially she used her own home but then moved it to a larger property.



Her goal was to make the house a real home rather than a hostel run by staff.

She said: "Today has been a wonderful day and party and just amazing. My inspiration for the work has come from God who changed

my life and has kept the House of Genesis going in reality. In the Bible we are told not to forget to show hospitality to strangers for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it."

A community that cares

As a £19m 'care village' on the edge of **Norwich** prepares to open its doors next spring, members of nearby **Bowthorpe Church**, are helping to develop a **Dementia Friendly Community** in the area. **Mike Wiltshire** reports.

An 80-bed specialised care home, called Mayflower Court, with a further 92 apartments, part of a housing-with-care-scheme, called The Meadows, are being built on a 79-acre site at Three Score in Bowthorpe by NorseCare, owned by Norfolk County Council, working in partnership with the Saffron Housing Trust.

Although there are more than 850,000 registered dementia sufferers in the UK – of whom 17,000 are in Norfolk, there is widespread anxiety about the impact of the illness, which comes in 200 varieties, and which starts with loss of short-term memory and changes of perception. It is believed that one person in 14 could develop dementia, including younger people. The youngest sufferer in Norfolk is a woman aged 27.

In Norfolk, there are around 70 dementia cafes, run by the Alzheimer's Society and Age UK. They provide a safe and supportive environment for people with dementia. They also enable carers to socialise and find advice. However, there is much that the wider community can learn in helping to ease the burden for sufferers and carers alike.

By becoming "Dementia Friends", members and friends of Bowthorpe Church – located half-a-mile from the Care Village – have learned vital aspects about dementia and the many misconceptions. For example: dementia is not a natural part of ageing; it's possible to live well with dementia; it's not just about memory-loss and mood changes – it can affect thinking, communicating and doing everyday tasks.

"There's more to a person than dementia," says Lois Wiltshire, a "Dementia Friends Champion," who networks in



Lois Wiltshire, in a hard-hat, tours the new Care Village at Bowthorpe.

the area on behalf of Bowthorpe Church. "We want to turn our new understanding into action."

Kate Grange, who works with the Community Engagement Partnership and NorseCare, is working with Lois and others to show that, with support, people with dementia can and do take an active role in life.

As a care provider, NorseCare, is keen to be an integral part of the local community, "and Bowthorpe is no different," says Richard Smith, marketing manager of the care company. "We have already been working very closely with Bowthorpe Church, sharing our plans for the care village, helping them with community groups, Dementia Friends sessions, pastoral support and many more activities. The local church has a vital role in the community," he adds. "We hope the new care village and the church can share facilities."

Dementia Friendly Communities, such as those in Aylesham, Wymonham, Swaffham, Diss and Wayland and Wells, are based on

inclusion, where people living with dementia feel empowered to play an active role in their communities – for example, having a coffee or meal with friends or shopping for a gift for a loved one.

The 'Welcome Me as I Am' project, which promotes awareness of mental health in faith communities and in the wider world, says: "Churches need to welcome and include people with dementia, as well as their carers."

Meanwhile, Heather Edwards, a Norwich teacher and hospital volunteer, has developed the 'Music Mirrors' resource project – a unique way to spark memory through music, which is "language beyond words." There has been national interest among healthcare professionals in Heather's system which awakens emotions and helps the person with dementia to feel recognised and valued. Heather, is a Quaker who also worships with the German Lutheran Church in East Anglia.

For details about the work of "Dementia Friends", call Lois on 01603 503 274.

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SUPPORT & ADVICE ACCOMMODATION FAMILY WORK HEALTH & WELLBEING TRAINING & EDUCATION

Chaplain to those on streets of Norwich

Norwich's self-appointed chaplain to the streets, **Carrie Sant**, is an expert social networker – with the homeless, refugees, asylum seekers and addicts. **Helen Baldry** reports.

She doesn't have a website, she doesn't produce leaflets and doesn't tweet, but Christian outreach worker Carrie Sant is a social networker par excellence. Carrie works in Norwich with homeless people, asylum seekers, refugees, addicts and any vulnerable people who need help.

She is a qualified nurse, ordained minister and trained counsellor with a natural skill for helping people. She describes herself as a self-appointed chaplain to the streets. Carrie takes action where she sees a need and says that she asks God what she should be doing each day and just tries to follow His leading.

Carrie said: "I was aware of the enormous need in people's lives, and as a Christian, I am aware of the enormous resource that is the church. My heart is to try and connect the church to the need in a safe and effective way."

Having experienced poverty and even homelessness herself and having experienced the devastating effects of addiction and poor mental health within her own family, Carrie is able to empathise with the people she meets.

Much of Carrie's work 'just happens' due to the extensive connections she has with individuals, agencies and organisations in the city.

She said: "I believe God's put me in this very strategic place where I have a pretty good idea of what's happening and what is needed."

For example, an elderly refugee was moved to a house which was entirely unfurnished and she had no belongings whatsoever. Carrie



Carrie Sant helps teach pottery at the Turn Around Stays farm near Garboldisham.

received a call that day from somebody who's relative had died and wanted to give everything – kitchen contents, furniture, appliances – to somebody in need.

Inspired by Genesis 11, the motto of Carrie's group, City Saints in Action, is 'blessed to be a blessing' and they have an ability to spot opportunities to assist in very practical ways.

Every year, Carrie turns up on the last day of the Norfolk-based Christian festival Newday with a team of helpers and vans, this year they collected about £4,500 worth of unused food from groups at the campsite. The perishable food is distributed amongst hostels and families in need and non-

perishable items are saved to use for their weekly open table lunches and to give to people in need, including newly-arrived asylum seekers and refugees.

At Christmas with added provisions from Norfolk farmers and Norwich Foodbank they deliver up to 250 hampers to people in need.

Carrie likens her role to that of a midwife – assisting in the birth of new projects – seven have sprung out of small beginnings, including an informal language group which, under the vision and leadership of Rosie Sexton, has since blossomed into English+, to support people who have moved to Norwich to speak English.

House to Home was started by a

refugee who, after volunteering with City Saints and receiving support from them, wanted to help others in their settlement process.

Turn Around Stays is based on a farm near Garboldisham where groups volunteer and gain practical skills, such as pottery. From this, eight men at present, enjoy much-needed space, living for a while, away from chaotic circumstances.

Carrie said: "Our ethos is to build new social networks by working together to help other people."

The impact Carrie and her team have on the city is evident; after City Saints take action, amazing things follow in their wake.

Short Norwich film tells Christmas story

■ The Diocese of Norwich has produced a short new film entitled The Story of Christmas to help people understand the birth of Jesus Christ.

Shocking statistics in a recent study showed just 12 per cent of adults know the nativity story, and more than one-third of children don't know whose birthday it is.

The new film aims to help young and old discover the true meaning of Christmas. The animation re-tells the nativity story and is narrated by the Bishop of Norwich the Rt Rev Graham James.

Bishop Graham said: "Everyone celebrates Christmas but not everyone knows the story of Christmas, though they often think they do. So we need to tell it as vividly as possible in the language of today."

The Ven Jan McFarlane, Archdeacon of Norwich said: "For vast numbers of people Christ is still very much at the heart of Christmas, even if their knowledge is a little hazy. Our hope is this film will remind us of the wonder which lies at the very heart of Christmas in the form of a tiny infant born to teach us the power of unconditional love."

You can see the film at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pu99qCegVNU>

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Towering effort from Les

■ Les Moore, a retired hospital chef, has created a fund-raising image of the historic landmark tower at his local village church of St Andrew's in Eaton, Norwich, despite being blind in one eye through serious illness.

Les built the tower model (pictured right) out of old wallpaper pasting tables and covered it with photos of the tower's flinty surface, to help raise £35,000 towards the £40,000 needed to repair the 15th century tower.

The 80ft flint tower stands alongside the 13th century parish church, the only thatched-roof church in Norwich.

In his home workshop, Les has made stage-sets, puppets, scenery and visual aids for his work in running more than 100 holiday clubs for children, over the years.

Now 68, Les is an evangelist at heart who



vividly remembers the night when, at the age of 9, he came to faith in Jesus Christ.

In recent years he has survived serious illness and

has found comfort from Psalm 27:13: "I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."



Celia Harmer from Norwich, who has produced an inspiring Lifeline DVD.

Celia's show of courage

Medics told the Norfolk grandmother that she has three to ten years to live, but she faces each day with courage, believing her life is now richer than before she had the disease.

"God has shown me real love through family and friends and strangely I am more alive now than before the cancer," says Celia, who lives near Norwich.

Her vibrant faith has given her blessings for life and hope for death, helping her withstand the fears, pressures and dictates of the disease through prayer and loving support.

Celia shares her inspiring message through 'Lifeline' – a DVD made to give every suffering soul new hope.

She is often tired and cancer has now spread to her breast bone, ribs and lungs and surgery is impossible but she says: "I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives me. I want to shout it from the roof tops that Jesus is alive. If you are suffering in any way or are at breaking point, Jesus comes if you ask him."

'Lifeline' was made seven years ago after Celia received the bleak medical report, despite previous chemo and radiotherapy for the disease.

She was too weak to carry a camcorder on a tripod but enlisted the help of a photographer friend for the

Many of us will be lighting candles this Christmas, but **Celia Harmer's** home is usually aglow throughout the year. She regularly lights candles as a reminder that Jesus is the light of the world, as she lives with inoperable breast cancer. **Sandie Shirley** reports.

filming and editing using lessons from 'BBC Voices.'

She has already given away over 1,000 copies of the short film to people from all walks of life. She encourages people to take one – "It is a blessing – a 'lifeline' to anyone in distress through the power of prayer," says Celia.

The film was first intended to help members of the Norfolk and Norwich Big C Centre's Rosemary Group – a support group for women living with secondary cancer.

Celia attends the weekly meetings where raw emotions, laughter and friendship are shared to help everyone cope with the challenges of cancer.

She says: "Caring friends and family, together with quiet reflection and the beauty of creation, are like blessings from God."

She believes no valley is too dark for the light and love of Jesus to penetrate. Two decades ago she survived a ruptured ectopic pregnancy when she was close to death.

Celia recalls being in agony in the hospital operating theatre. Unable to breathe, an oxygen mask was placed over her head. She prayed, prepared to die as her life seemed to ebb away, but suddenly Celia felt different. "It was as though I was being filled with hot water – I felt warmth and peace. I was amazed by the result of my prayer; when I came round I learnt that I had been given just 20 minutes left to live," she says.

Celia has lost many friends to cancer. She says: "I know I am here through the grace of my Lord Jesus and I am helped by his love; the prayers of others and his love working through others."

"We are on this earth together with different parts to play and I am here by the skill of doctors, nurses and by science," says Celia who continued radiotherapy last year to help fight the disease that first struck 17 years ago.

She adds: "I am here until it is too much for me and God takes me home to be with him."

Copies of Celia's DVD are available free from: Revelation, St Michael at Plea Church, Redwell Street, Norwich NR2 4SN (enclose second class sae).

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