

A uniting faith

Andrew Avramenko, a curate at St Stephen's & St Mary's, Bath who has Ukrainian connections, reflects on hope in challenging times.



Andrew and his family at a rally for Ukraine in Bath

What's the Ukrainian connection?

My father is Ukrainian. His parents survived the Holodomor, a forced famine in the 1930s by Stalin that aimed to wipe out Ukrainian identity - over 7 million died. They escaped from Stalin's forces and from the Nazis when my father was a young child. They travelled across Europe on foot before being welcomed as refugees into the UK. I also have connections with both the Anglican and Orthodox Ukrainian churches.

Is faith important to Ukrainians?

Faith is very much part of the Ukrainian identity and their way of living. On social media you can see people praying and holding services in underground shelters, in

underpasses and even in front of a church while warning sirens sound. Ukrainians are asking for prayers, not just for themselves but also for Russians, and have been deeply touched and encouraged by them.

Is faith a support in challenging times?

Faith is a very active thing that strengthens us, unites us and calls us to a better way, a peaceful way, out of this. It helps us to see people as human rather than a label, even our enemies. It unites us with people around the world, bringing us together in such a way that we couldn't do in many other ways.

How does conflict affect your faith?

If anything it strengthens my faith. I came to faith in part due to the last war in Europe, in Yugoslavia, and took aid to refugees. Although we may feel powerless, we do have the power to act; just as we have the power to do evil, we have the chance to do good and replace hate with love.

Read the full interview at: bathandwells.org.uk/a-uniting-faith

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From the Church of England Diocese of Bath and Wells ☩

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A time of hope

After two years of living with a pandemic, churches across Somerset are preparing for what is hoped to be a return to marking Holy Week in a more usual way.

For the newly designated Taunton Minster, St Mary Magdalene, it will be the first it marks as a Minster, and for its vicar, Tobie Osmond, it will be the first full Holy Week during which he can welcome people to the church in person since taking up the post more than two years ago.

He says, "I am sure I am not alone in feeling that it will be good to have somewhat close to a 'normal' Holy Week, even though it won't be completely the same as prior to the pandemic. After various services and activities throughout the week we'll be having a sunrise service on Easter Sunday at 6am, followed by breakfast, and I am sure Easter eggs will feature in our service later in the morning. It will still be a hybrid offering as there are some who still feel unable to return to church, which is completely understandable, and it is important they can still join



with us online."

While a return to 'normal' is the hope, Tobie also recognises the positives from the changes wrought by the pandemic. He says, "By sharing our services online we are also able to reach out to people not just in Taunton, but around the world. We regularly have people join us from Zambia, our partner diocese, also Canada, South Africa and Australia."

The church was formally designated as a Minister by Bishop Ruth on Sunday, 13 March. She said, "This new designation comes when Taunton, like the rest of the UK, is dealing with the challenge of recovering from the Covid pandemic, but it is also a time of hope and positivity for the future."

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News in brief

Prayers & support for Ukraine

Churches across Bath and Wells have been praying for Ukraine and for peace. Many are open for those who wish to have a quiet moment of prayer or to light a candle, others have been holding prayer vigils. Locally church communities are working closely with aid agencies to raise money and support those in need in Ukraine and refugees from the conflict, including St Mary's Bridgwater and St John's, Yeovil. Bath Abbey showed a very visible sign of support, lighting up in blue and yellow ■



Platinum celebrations

From 2 to 5 June this year we will celebrate Her Majesty, The Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

HOPE Together is working with others to help churches mark the occasion and, in particular, to celebrate the Queen's 70 years of faith and service. There are a range



Steeplejacks assess the damage

View from the top

Work is underway to repair the spire of St Thomas', Wells. The church hit the headlines when two and a half metres of the spire plus its two and a half metre long weather vane came down during Storm Eunice.

Revd Claire Towns saw the whole thing. She said, "We were just really shocked this happened, but equally feel very thankful that nobody was hurt" ■

of ideas and resources provided for communities, schools, churches and youth organisations. A website celebrating the Queen's faith and service focuses on six ways to mark the occasion; celebrate, sing, gift, learn, service and invite. Find out more at theplatinumjubilee.com ■

Hope in turbulent world

I write this on Ash Wednesday, a day when we begin a period of reflection and penitence, and remember our mortality. Those of us receiving the ash crosses on our foreheads today will hear these words: 'Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return...'

We have been invited us to set this Ash Wednesday aside to pray for peace in Ukraine. It would be easy for us to point the finger at those we hold responsible for such atrocity and yet we need to recognise that all of us carry responsibility for our own failures to live as peacemakers and reconcilers. Not one of us is perfect and Lent offers us an opportunity for honest realism and a chance to repent and seek forgiveness.

As you read this we will be approaching the end of Lent, and Easter will be in sight. Much will have happened in the world since I wrote it. Two years ago, I was praying for the world caught up in the early throes of a pandemic. Who could have known that we would still be living with the virus and how much life would have changed? Today I am joining in the prayer and fasting for countries at war. Where will we be as we enter Holy week and approach

Easter? What might be the outcome for Ukraine, Russia, ourselves?

And yet that is the very heart of faith. We do not know what the future holds but we do know the One who holds us. The fact is that God so loved the world that when He sees us in our greatest need, at our most threatened, He comes to be with us. To share the pain and give Himself fully, even to the point of death. And the story of Easter tells us that death is not the end. That life is found through the death of the Saviour.

I don't know what your experience of these last couple of years has been. I expect many of us carry the scars of loss. Pain and death are not things we can avoid. And neither did Christ. The hope He offers us is that they are not the end of the story but rather the beginning. Hope can be ignited and life restored through the faithful following in the footsteps of the One who loves us.

It does not mean that all will be wonderful. It won't stop wars. But it does mean that hope, forgiveness and new starts can be found as we look to follow Christ's example.

+ *Ron Tanton*