

## Gift of years talk for Rugby Ultreya

Hi my name is Jean, I have been a Christian for approx 25 years, since joining St.George's church family following the baptism of our eldest daughter Joanne.

I never expected to be standing in front of you all giving such a talk as this!! Especially as I am a nervous, self conscious individual but it never ceases to amaze me the paths that my journey of faith has taken me on. Many unexpected opportunities with encouragement from many wonderful, inspirational people.

Since becoming a Christian, being involved in the Rugby team ministry and blessed with many special Christian friends I have been challenged to face my fears constantly with church duties, groups and especially children's work.

While our daughters were of school age, I worked as a teaching assistant supporting children with special needs.

As church warden for a short while I was able to develop pastoral links and relationships with the elder congregation as a result.

My main interest and first job was as a Florist. I gained a great passion for flowers through my work with many different florists businesses over the years and developed my skills enough to give me confidence to share my passion with friends and groups. It is wonderful to see the joy that flowers bring to many people in many different circumstances.

Cursillo helped me to really focus on how God sees me and loves me through all things and 'just as I am' with all my faults, concerns and self-doubting. Therefore I have been unexpectedly challenged to listen to him and to step out of my comfort zone many times.

Godly Play has been a particularly rewarding experience where I went for a three day training course and have been able to deliver regular sessions at St.George's and in many children's settings. It is a wonderful, simple, visual way of telling bible stories and helping to explore our spirituality in response to them. It is also well received by many adults, another unexpected opportunity and I look forward to developing it further.

One day my vicar Hilary approached me about a new project called 'Gift of Years' which was being run by the churches of Rugby as part of 'Revive.'

Lindsay Pelloquin a friend of Hilary's was looking for volunteers to train and visit care homes to help share God's love there.

My first response, of course was one of doubt, my skills were with flowers and children's work!

But, as Hilary reminded me, I had been involved with pastoral work with our elderly church members and had cared for elderly family members (and took pleasure in it.) The idea played on my mind so I thought it no harm to try the course and see how I felt and if it really was something I could do.

Well the training course was so well delivered by Lindsay and Jaye (who had worked together in a care home in Leicester.) They both shared some amazing stories, inspiring us all and emphasising the need for this project.

We were encouraged to understand the needs of each resident, to give them quality time and a listening ear. To enable them to take part in worship, receive ministry if desired and to join in with creative ideas and resources. Ultimately to find purpose, meaning, have a sense of belonging and live as fulfilling a life as possible, or just discover a new friend.

With the help and encouragement from Lindsay, Jaye, many of the Rugby clergy, worship and prayer and sharing of our ideas and gifts, we became a friendly , enthusiastic team, eager to journey together with all we had to offer.

Having considered what I had to offer, I began visiting at Westlands care home. I was immediately welcomed by the staff and residents. Following some lovely conversations, I was eager to return. I felt such a sense of privilege and joy on each visit.

It was then planned that I should try some flower arranging with some residents, well, I didn't expect the positive response! Sharing my passion of flowers and seeing the joyful way it was received was an absolute pleasure. And so in trying to bless others in my small way, I feel that I have been blessed in a much bigger way! When you are nervous and unsure to be asked "when will you be back, I will look forward to it?" Just takes away any feelings of self doubt.

I have also been able to share some of the Godly play following a craft activity, which was well received, so another unexpected opportunity! And a chance to develop my Godly Play stories and skills further.

Some of the residents commented on how nice it was, also, to be able to come out of their rooms and socialise more, talk to each other and not just at meal times.

I am happy to talk later to anyone who is interested in finding out more and maybe even if you are interested in becoming a volunteer. The commitment is as much or as little as you wish. It might be an unexpected blessing to you!

Thank you for listening,  
God bless.