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THE PILGRIMS' magazine

WINTER 2025

'Tis the season TO BE JOLLY

Our folk share joy-filled memories

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We say goodbye to much-loved colleagues

HOW TO MAKE

your church dementia-friendly

PILGRIMS' FRIEND SOCIETY

PILGRIMS' FRIEND SOCIETY

Fulfilled *living* in later life

Pilgrims' Friend Society exists to provide excellent care and support for older people, inspiring and encouraging them to live fulfilled lives. Rooted in the Christian faith, Pilgrims' Friend Society is committed to creating Christian communities in residential care homes and independent living housing schemes in England and Scotland.

Got a great story?

Email our editor Helen on

✉ helen.nathan@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

Sign up for our magazine

If you don't yet get the magazine, you can sign up here:

www.pilgrimsfriend.org.uk/magazine

Or contact us via the details below:

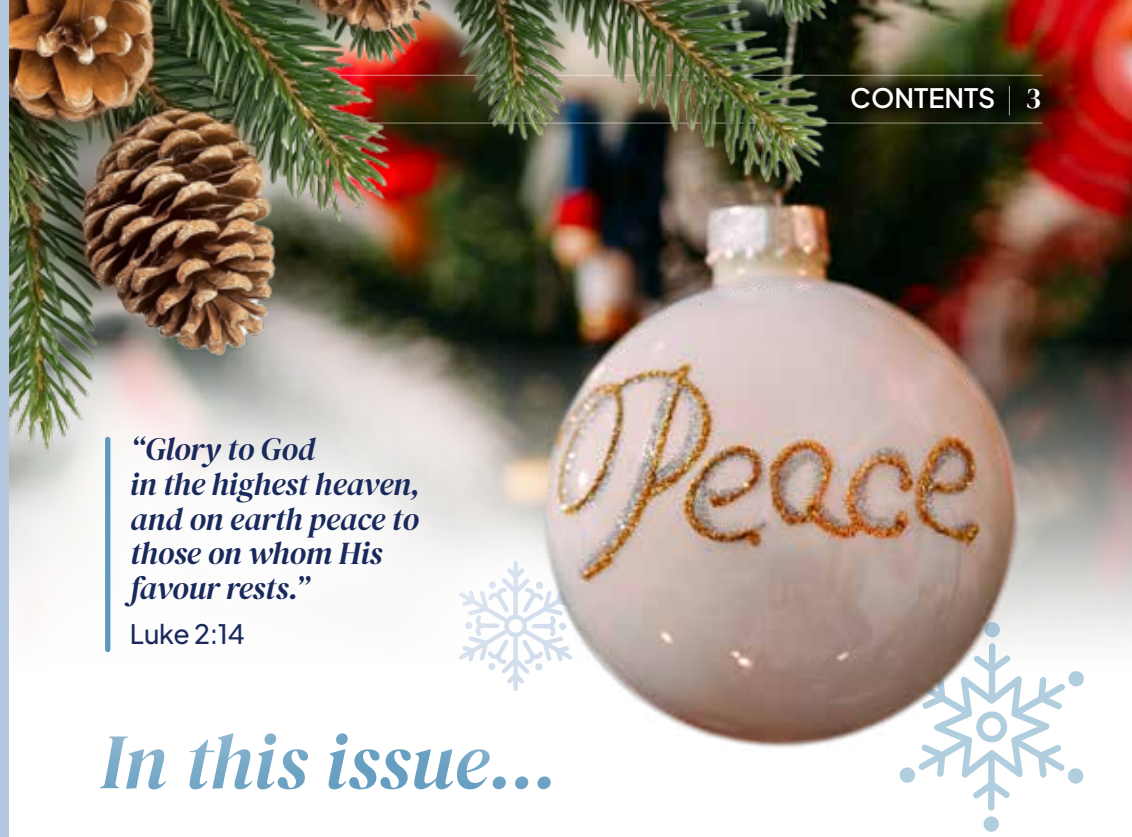
Pilgrims' Friend Society,
175 Tower Bridge Road, London SE1 2AL

0300 303 1403

info@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

www.pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

Cover stories



> ***"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favour rests."***
> Luke 2:14

In this issue...

NEWS round-up

All the latest news from across our organisation

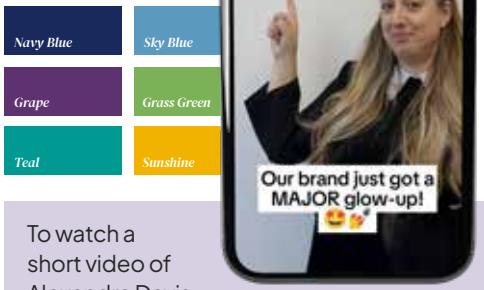
New look, same mission

When you picked up your copy of this magazine, you may well have spotted we've made a few changes to how things look.

With so much going on within the organisation as we grow and invest in our care homes and housing, we wanted to make sure that our branding was playing a key role in catching the eye and communicating a bit about our work and our vision.

Our logo has had a refresh – we've kept our name because it's a crucial part of who we are, but we've added a cross and roof element so that it's a bit clearer that we're a Christian organisation and that we do something around housing. For people who are new to us, we want that essence of our work to be immediately recognisable.

We've also changed our colours. We've chosen a darker blue from the one we were using before – it's a bit more refined and conjures up a sense of heritage. Alongside that dark navy is a bright teal which adds vibrancy and clarity, combining our heritage with our dynamic and vibrant communities. There's also a grape tone that can be complimented with natural blue, green, and yellow tones. As well as sprucing up our colour palette, we've also opted for a few new fonts.



To watch a short video of Alexandra Davis, our Director of Marketing and Communications, explaining our rebrand, please visit:
www.pilgrimsfriend.org.uk/new-look

As we go forwards, we believe this new look will help us better reflect the Christian values that underpin our charity's approach and the wonderful work that goes on across our care homes, housing schemes and wider organisation each day.

The Way We Care Latest films

This year, we've created some new films to help show how we care for those living in our homes. Our latest film, 'Marian's life at Evington Home', follows the story of an inspirational lady who loves craft and chatting but who struggles to leave her bed due to ill-health. Visitors dropping by ensure she stays connected to life at the home.

This film comes after 'David's life at Milward House' about a gentleman living with dementia who, thanks to support from our Hummingbird Peter and other staff at the home, remains active and regularly gets out and about in the local area.

As we go to press, we're working on another film exploring how music enriches life for 'family members' (those who live with us) at Luff House in Walton-on-the-Naze, from shanty bands to Elvis impersonators.

To watch our existing films and to stay up to date with our latest releases, visit:
www.pilgrimsfriend.org.uk/thewaywecare

In other news...

Jason Denny is the new Registered Care Manager at Milward House in Tunbridge Wells while Sohail Qamar is the new Home Manager at Bethany House, Preston. At Koinonia Christian Care Home in Worthing, Mario Marzolini joins the team as Business Manager. In our Operations Team, Adrian Topping is our new Assistant Director of Operations while Simon Corp joins the Property Services Team as Development Manager.

Follow us on social media:

Contact details

Could you or a loved one come to live with us?

Here are the contact details for our homes and housing schemes. If you'd like to find out more, do get in touch. Each location also has its own page on our website:

www.pilgrimsfriend.org.uk/homes
www.pilgrimsfriend.org.uk/housing

Residential care homes

BETHANY HOUSE, PRESTON
0300 303 1724
bethanypreston@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

BRIDGEMEAD, BATH
0300 131 9115
bridgemead@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

EMMAUS HOUSE, HARROGATE
0300 303 8450
emmaushouse@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

EMMAUS HOUSE, WHITEHAVEN
0300 303 1440
emmauscumbria@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

EVINGTON HOME, LEICESTER
0300 303 1455
evington@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

FINBOROUGH COURT, GREAT FINBOROUGH
0300 303 1450
finboroughcourt@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

FRAMLAND, WANTAGE
0300 303 1470
wantage@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

KOINONIA CHRISTIAN CARE HOME, WORTHING
0300 303 8480
koinonia@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

LUFF HOUSE, WALTON-ON-THE-NAZE
0300 303 1495
luffhouse@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

MIDDLEFIELDS HOUSE, CHIPPENHAM
0300 303 8470
middlefieldshouse@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

MILWARD HOUSE, TUNBRIDGE WELLS
0300 303 1460
milward@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

SHOTTERMILL HOUSE, HASLEMERE
0300 303 1475
shottermill@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

Independent living housing schemes

CAREY GARDENS, KIRBY MUXLOE
0300 303 8455
carey.gardens@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

DOROTHEA COURT, BEDFORD
0300 303 1490
dorothea@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

FINBOROUGH COURT HOUSING, GREAT FINBOROUGH
0300 303 1450
housingmanager.finborough@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

HOMESDALE, WANSTEAD, LONDON
0300 303 8485
homesdale@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

LUFF MEWS & SELHURST COURT, WALTON-ON-THE-NAZE
0300 303 1495
luffhouse@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

MILWARD HOUSE HOUSING, TUNBRIDGE WELLS
0300 303 1460
milward@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

PILGRIM GARDENS, LEICESTER
0300 303 8455
andy.harrison@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

ROYD COURT, MIRFIELD
0300 303 1480
roydcourt@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

STRATHCLYDE HOUSE, SKELMORLIE
0300 303 8465
strathclyde@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

A *legacy* of care

As told to: Helen Nathan

As they bid us farewell, long-serving staff members reflect on the changes they have seen over the years, what has made working here so special, and their hopes for the future

Barbara Margetts

...joined Pilgrims' Friend Society in 1999 as the manager of Framland, Wantage after working as a nurse in the NHS. She then became part of the Operations Team, supporting colleagues across the country as Assistant Director of Operations

"At the time I became a care home manager, there were a lot of changes in the sector, so I not only had to get to know the home but also get up to speed with all the new regulations. It was a lot to take in, but I always say the role brought together the three things I love: training and development, managing, and working with older people.

"Daily devotions were always a feature of life in our homes but one thing that has changed is our approach to the social life of the home. When I started at Framland, we had someone leading activities for a couple of hours each day. Now, we have a whole host of roles – Activities and Community Engagement (ACE) Facilitator, Hummingbird, Wellbeing and Dementia Lead – all dedicated to fostering connection.

"I think the difference is that people used to come into care homes much sooner and were more independent. Today, people come with a much higher level of need and need more support to engage. Carers also now have to give higher levels of care, so having staff whose sole focus is on fostering social interaction is important.

"Another big change has been the move from paper-based systems to a digital way of documenting information, as well as administering medications and auditing. There's also now a whole suite of online training people can do.

"I love that I've been able to spend the past 26 years working with a Christian organisation and I pray that we never lose the central core of our Christian faith. I'm also praying that more people will know who we are and what we have to offer. I hope one day there will be a Pilgrims' Friend Society care home in Wales, where I live. I know there are differences in funding and regulation, but there are other organisations that operate in England and Wales, so I know it's not impossible."

> *"It's not just about one person but how you relate to each other."*

Louise Morse

...joined our organisation in 2000. Bringing a wealth of experience in journalism and marketing, she oversaw our publicity, spoke regularly at events and has authored several books, including many on dementia

"When I started, things were much more amateur than they are now. There was this tremendous swell of goodwill, with the Christian faith at its heart. At the executive level, there were people in place with a lot of talent and a high level of professional experience. But as far as the homes were concerned, there wasn't much planning and looking forward. It was 'as God provides'.

"However, a raft of legislation was brought in which made the sector increasingly regulated, and we had to respond to that. Responsibility for the homes, which had been managed locally, passed to the charity itself. I remember the then Chief Executive, Peter Turvet, giving a speech where he described adjusting to the regulations as being like driving a car down a country lane without being able to see over the hedge, or round the corner.

"Some of the homes had to close. At our home in Southport, for example, the area of each room did not meet the required specifications. It was also losing money hand over fist. The closure brought a lot of heartache but wonderfully all the residents found new homes, seven of them all together in another Christian home which happened to have seven free spaces. I wrote an article about it for this magazine.

"Through my talks and resources, I've also done a lot of work on helping those living with dementia and their caregivers. There's now a much greater understanding of dementia, but the big question for individuals remains as it always was 'what does this mean for me?'. I remember giving a talk once and afterwards there were 30 people lined up with questions all along the lines of 'what does it mean when my mother does this?'

"Going forward, I hope Pilgrims' Friend Society will continue to speak to churches about dementia. People need to know that the person with dementia remains, they haven't gone anywhere. It's like, don't talk to the brain, it's not listening. Talk to the soul.

"I'm also praying that God would continue to bring staff to our care home teams who have a real vocation. As one carer at Finborough Court [in Great Finborough] once said to me, great care isn't so much person-centred but relational. It's not just about one person but how you relate to each other."

Phil Wainwright

...joined us on 9th August 1993, a date that sticks in his mind as it was three days before the birth of his youngest son. Originally brought in as Systems and Payroll Officer, his role expanded to include HR and, for a time, aspects of publicity

"When I started it was to implement a computer system. There were four computers in the organisation at that time, all in Head Office [now known as the Support Office]. When computers were introduced at the homes, the main purpose was for word-processing. Before that, things like letters would be typed on typewriters. We didn't have email (we had no internet), so we used fax machines to send each other memos. You were also on the phone a lot of the time.

"At that time, the Chief Executive was Trevor Dennett. He was a lovely man and every Monday he phoned all the matrons to check how things were going. His wife Evelyn was the matron at Shottermill House in Haslemere and so I think he had a good understanding of the pressures of the role.

"Over the years things have changed a lot in terms of digitisation. We now use email all the time, interact via video calls and use AI to transcribe meetings. Our payroll system has also become much more integrated.

"I hope before too long the organisation will also have one centralised HR database. At the moment, staff at the homes are sometimes having to dig information out of paper files and that's not ideal.

"There's also been a lot of changes in how the homes are organised. When I started, we didn't have managers. All the homes were run by matrons and they were all women. Lady Visitors used to come into the homes to give spiritual support. Shortly after I started, this title was changed to Home Visitors so that men could visit too. These days, we simply have volunteers.

> *"One thing that's stayed the same in all the years I've been working for the charity is the commitment to prayer.*

"One thing that's stayed the same in all the years I've been working for the charity is the commitment to prayer. Early on, I was struck how every meeting begins with prayer. We've also always had a 12noon prayer meeting.

"Going forward, I hope that we continue to grow and build new homes. I'm always meeting people who say they wish there was a Pilgrims' Friend Society home near them."

Margaret Wetton

...has been with us as Operations Manager since November 2017. It's a role that's taken her all around the country, and brought her into the company of some very special individuals

"When I joined Pilgrims' Friend Society, I was instantly welcomed. It was like coming back to family, which is what it was, really. Everyone in senior leadership is a Christian, and so we're all brothers and sisters in Christ.

"In my time, I've line-managed homes and housing schemes right across the country and, I'll tell you what, my English geography has greatly improved. As the Operations Team, we're really privileged to be able to do our work, not just to support the staff at the homes but to meet the 'family members' [as we call those who live with us] and do things in the background that will make a difference to their lives.

"I remember one lady, Olive, who lives at Shottermill House in Haslemere. I used to love just sitting and listening to her and having lunch with her. A short time after the visit, I received a letter from what was then called the Head Office. I thought, 'Why would I be getting something from Head Office?' Inside the envelope, there was a letter forwarded from Olive to thank me for having lunch with her, and some poetry to finish with. It made me go, 'That's what makes the difference, that's what makes it all worthwhile.'

> *"That's what I feel about working with Pilgrims' Friend Society – we've got God's song in our heart."*

"As a Christian organisation, it's wonderful that we can all join together on a video call each day to pray. One day, I was leading the prayer time and shared something from Fanny Crosby, the hymnwriter who was blind. One of her phrases was 'it's not enough to have a song on your lips, you must also have a song in your heart.' That's what I feel about working with Pilgrims' Friend Society – we've got God's song in our heart."

As we were finalising our magazine, we received some exciting news...

While Margaret will be stepping back from her role as Operations Manager, she'll be continuing to work with Pilgrims' Friend Society supporting the Operations Team.

Please pray Thank you Barbara, Louise, Phil and Margaret for your years of dedicated service to Pilgrims' Friend Society. May the Lord guide you in whatever comes next.

A circle of *friendship*

Words: Tyler Sewell-Nicholas

Christine, 87, and her husband Murdoch, 91, have lived at Strathclyde House in Skelmorlie for five years. Wanting to find new ways to serve the Lord, Christine has set up a weekly Ladies Together group at the housing scheme

Christine is the sort of person who makes you feel welcome before you've even sat down. At 87, she still has a quick smile and a twinkle of humour that puts people at ease. Every Monday afternoon at 2pm, that warmth fills the lounge at Strathclyde House in Skelmorlie, where a group gathers for Ladies Together. For those who attend, it is a community of fellowship that carries them through the week.

The group began quietly, almost by accident. Christine noticed that some of the ladies at the home longed for a space to meet. "I thought, why not just invite them all together?" she recalls. "We want people to enjoy friendship and have a sense of community."

Christine speaks fondly of Kathryn, one of the group's regulars: "We have a nice friendship and the group we've formed at Strathclyde House is wonderful."

Each week, a dozen or so ladies arrive – some early to help set up, others slowly making their way with walking sticks or leaning on one another's arms. Conversations begin naturally. Christine has no airs about leading. She sees herself as a host more than a teacher, gently guiding the discussion with questions and reflections. "People share about their struggles and we enjoy life together," she says.

> *"It can get quite chatty, and I like to encourage our quieter members to join in and share with the group..."*

The rhythm of the group is simple but meaningful. Someone reads aloud, another shares a thought, and soon voices overlap as the ladies connect: the challenges of ageing, the worries about children and grandchildren, the loneliness of bereavement, the ordinary difficulties of everyday life. At times, laughter fills the air over a shared memory or story.

"It can get quite chatty, and I like to encourage our quieter members to join in and share with the group," Christine says. "It helps everyone feel more connected."

The friendships don't just end in the lounge area. Over time, the group has woven in outings that have become highlights of the year. They have shared lunches at the local garden centre, trips to the theatre and to the beach in Largs, and even a cruise on the Waverley paddle steamer. These excursions give texture to their fellowship, building memories that they carry back to the group each Monday. "It's amazing what a difference it makes to get out together," Christine says. "It doesn't have to be fancy - it's just about being with one another."

As well as the Monday meeting, the ladies also organise events such a charity coffee morning and visits from the ice cream van.

MARGARET

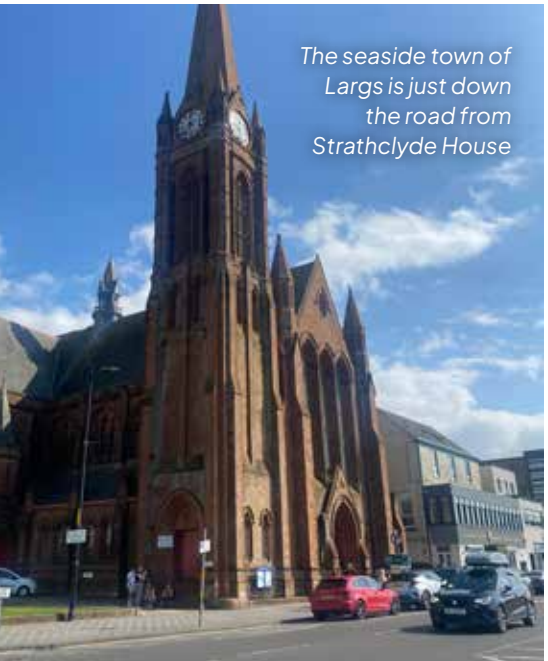
For some, the group has become a highlight of the week. Margaret, 74, puts it simply: "This group gives me something to look forward to each week and reminds me I'm not alone in my faith."

Maureen, 72, echoes the sentiment: "Christine's dedication makes this possible. We laugh, we support one another – it's special." Both ladies speak with a gratitude that shows just how much the creation of the Ladies Together group has meant in their lives. Throughout the week, group members will pray for each other.

MAUREEN

When I visited, I was struck by how natural it all felt. The ladies spoke freely, with no fear of being judged. There was a sense of safety in the room, the kind that comes only when people have shared not just words but years together. Christine's role was quiet but unmistakable. She offered small nudges to keep the conversation flowing, asked gentle questions that invited honesty, and made sure everyone had a voice. Her leadership was the kind that does not call attention to itself, but without it, the gathering would not be what it is.

Christine herself is modest about her role. She insists she receives as much as she gives. "I enjoy hearing other people's perspectives and seeing how God works in their lives." Her favourite hymn is 'Do Not Be Afraid, For I Have Redeemed You', a reminder that God calls each person by name. That sense of being known and loved by God shapes the way she welcomes others into her group.



The seaside town of Largs is just down the road from Strathclyde House

Christine's favourite Bible verse:

'For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.'

John 3:16

To understand why the Ladies Together group feels the way it does, you have to step back, beyond the lounge and the laughter, to a life shaped early by faith and service. Christine grew up in Glasgow in a Baptist family where church was not a Sunday habit but a daily orientation. As a girl she sensed a call to mission; in those days, she laughed, if you said "missionary" people pictured the Belgian Congo because that was all anyone knew. The impulse, though, was clear: take the love of God seriously enough to carry it wherever it was needed.

As a young woman, Christine worked at the University of Glasgow as a photographer. Downstairs, in the geology department, was Murdoch. What began as a friendly invitation to the pictures (his sister could not go), turned into long conversations and soon, something more. At first Christine hesitated, she was a Christian and he was not yet a believer, but love and honesty did their quiet work. By the time they married in 1964, faith was the core they shared. "We both loved the Lord," she said simply, "and He was the one we depended on to keep us together."

Not long after, they followed the call outward. They moved to Belgium and spent seven years serving with a Christian printing ministry, producing French-language books and tracts, many destined for Congo. The work was demanding. Murdoch shouldered long hours on the presses; Christine managed home and hospitality, and, as their two sons arrived, navigated the hard arithmetic of calling and caregiving. There was deep satisfaction in the purpose, and sorrow: the leadership was not always kind, and some disappointments bit. "It was quite hard work," she says with characteristic understatement. When it became clear that the boys' schooling had to come first, they returned to Scotland with no self-pity and a steady resolve to keep serving where they were planted.

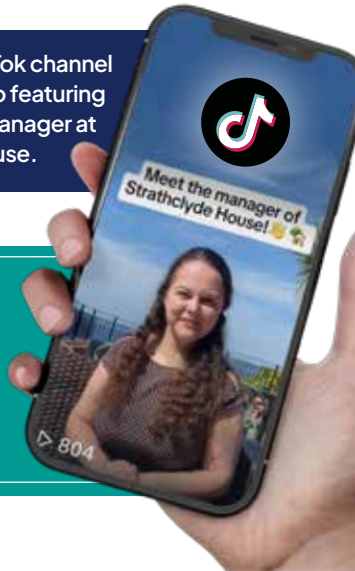
That pattern continued for decades. In Glasgow they joined a church, poured themselves into its life, and held open the doors of their home. Christine studied crafts for three years and exhibited her work. Murdoch was an elder in the church and visited many of the congregation. And when age began to ask difficult questions – steep stairs, a couple of falls, health that needed more attention – they prayed again and moved to Strathclyde House in Skelmorlie, trusting that God had a use for them there as well.

Like any real place, Strathclyde House carries both blessings and bumps. Christine has spoken plainly about both, the sun that floods their flat, the friendships that form in Monday morning prayer and mid-week meetings, the frustrations of buses that don't arrive by the bus stop outside on time, furniture that refuses to budge when you need a circle not a row. The disappointments do not dampen her faith; they refine her focus. If fellowship feels thin the answer is to make more of it.

The secret of the warmth of the Ladies Group is not complicated. Christine likes to treat hospitality as ministry. She believes that being known by name and listened to without hurry is a holy thing. She has learned, through decades of missionary work and marriage and church service, that joyful fellowship is knit out of simple, repeated acts: a welcome at the door, a free chair, a story honoured, a prayer offered.

If you ask her what has kept a marriage going for 61 years, she says, "We both love the Lord and depend on Him." Ask her what has kept a group like this together, her reply is always the same: love the Lord, love people, and provide space for fellowship.

Head to our TikTok channel to watch a video featuring Tina, Scheme Manager at Strathclyde House.



In her spare time, Christine:

- Loves to get busy with her sewing machine, making arts and crafts
- Is reading Bad Girls of the Bible by Liz Curtis Higgs

The gift of Christmas

Carols around the piano and even in Bethlehem itself – those living with us share precious memories from over the years

"Christmas in our house was a happy time. I remember Christmas baking days, when the kitchen walls ran with condensation as the Christmas pudding needed steaming for hours. We made our own Christmas cakes and mince pies too. If we children later discovered the silver thruppenny bit in the Christmas pudding that was wonderful. Over the Christmas days we would share times with church families as we went to each other's homes. This added to the Christmas spirit as we often sang around the piano of the dear Saviour who came from heaven to redeem us.

"As a child we had a good-sized house and I remember decorating it with holly, mistletoe, coloured paper chains, and also decorating our real Christmas tree! A coal fire burning in the grate would give me chilblains when sitting too near, as the rest of the house was so cold. Dad would put on the record player, his pride and joy, playing carols and Christmas music from the old 33 and 78 records. My children still regard some of that Christmas music as THE music to play at Christmas.

"Without television to distract us, playing games together, both in our home and when visiting friends, is another happy memory from Christmas. Charades was a particular favourite. One game I loved, but only played at our house, was completing well-known quotations and proverbs. These had been printed in two halves, and we put them separately around our large house to be discovered, identified as couplets, put together and collected, the winner being the one who gathered the most sets. One example, I remember was: 'A Nightingale Sang', with the couplet being 'in Berkeley Square'.

"One family we visited had a miniature railway laid out in the attic with model trains running around – the father was a model railway enthusiast. In another, the father was skilled in juggling, and I remember him trying to teach my friend and me to juggle with large wooden clubs."

Phyl, 79, Royd Court, Mirfield

"We moved from London to the country when I was about nine. I remember my grandfather and cousins would always visit us for Christmas because it was nicer than in London."

Sheila, 89, Koinonia Christian Care Home, Worthing

"I was about seven or eight years old when my family lived in Jerusalem. My father was the headteacher of a boys' school of some 700 pupils, and we lived in a flat just above the classrooms. He was also a priest, and our life seemed to revolve naturally around school, church, and family.

"That Christmas remains vivid in my mind. On Christmas Eve, we travelled to Bethlehem to hear a carol service. I remember the sense of wonder as we arrived — the thought that we were so close to where the story of Jesus' birth had unfolded. The service was being broadcast by the BBC all around the world, but for me, as a child, it was the music that filled me with joy: the sound of carols echoing in the very place where shepherds once heard the angels sing.

"Christmas Day itself was spent in Jerusalem, with my family. We attended church together, and I remember the service. To me, it felt like being at the very heart of Christmas."

Frances, 87, Middlefields House, Chippenham

"We had a large playroom in our home as we were seven children. As a family, we cut a Christmas tree from the forest. We decorated the tree with baubles, it was really beautiful. Presents were put under the tree with our names on but we didn't open them in the morning, rather we went to church. My father was the church minister and we opened the presents when we got home.

"On Christmas day, my dad would disappear. I found out later that he would visit his mother and take food for her and her neighbours who had very little. We would sing carols and hymns in our playroom and that is probably where my love of playing the piano began.

"When I had a family of my own, I would cook a chicken for our dinner and would play the organ during the service. We would then give our children presents."

Aileen, 81, Shottermill House, Haslemere

Festive singsongs helped inspire Aileen's life-long love of the piano and today she often plays for devotions at Shottermill House, Haslemere

GOING FOR growth

Our Growth and Renewal Programme is delivering Christian care for the future

Words: Alexandra Davis

When I arrived at Pilgrims' Friend Society in September 2019, I was introduced to the Renewal Programme – a commitment to build six new care homes in the next decade. It was an exciting and challenging vision to make sure we could keep looking after older people in Christian communities.

Now known as the Growth and Renewal Programme (GRP) and encompassing not just building new homes but welcoming existing homes into the Pilgrims' Friend Society programme, we're at a point where we're seeing a multitude of opportunities come our way. In order to be able to viably operate more homes and housing in a tight fiscal environment such as the UK care sector, we are exploring new ways to ensure that we can go for growth!

So, let's re-cap...

The GRP kicked off with Middlefields House in Chippenham which opened in 2021, then between April 2022 and April 2025 we have been joined by Koinonia Christian Care Home in Worthing, Emmaus House in Whitehaven, Homesdale care and housing in Wanstead, Bridgemead in Bath, and most recently we've been blessed by Bethany House in Preston.

We have had to say goodbye to two of our homes in recent years and the care home at Homesdale was closed in 2024 but only after it was announced that plans were being made to rebuild a 45-bed home in its place.

When we do the maths, we land at an overall increase of 108 of places for people to come and live with us, not counting the 45 we're expecting at Homesdale. Adding to this is the 70 flats at Homesdale, although we expect that number to go down to 64 as the new care home takes shape, which means that, in 2026, we anticipate we will be providing homes for around 200 more people than we were five years ago.

Just for starters...

All of this is underway, but that's just for starters! As well as the new home at Wanstead we recently announced that we've bought land in Crawley on which we plan to build a brand-new 72-bed home, and we are in conversation with potential partners as we explore options to build another new home in Worthing which we anticipate would also be home to at least 72 people.

And from there we are exploring options to buy a second-hand home in or around Harrogate to replace our wonderful but ageing Emmaus House, and in Bedford we are looking at options to replace Dorothea Court – also wonderful but ageing – so that we can keep providing housing in the area but with the addition of care as well.

In addition to all this, we're in conversation with another provider about some existing homes which we hope to be able to welcome into the Pilgrims' Friend Society in due course, and we're also looking at investing in our existing provision at Finborough Court in Great Finborough and Milward House in Tunbridge Wells.

Funding our vision of growth

Inevitably, the tricky part has never been the will to do more but getting the financial situation in the right place to enable that growth. We have been blessed by some significant gifts and legacies that have built our reserves which allows us to put down deposits and pay for some costs and so in the last year new avenues have been explored to see how Pilgrims' Friend Society could fund growth.

Led by Julian Hillman, our Director of Finance, we've been looking at ways of borrowing money to help us make this vision of growth a reality. This is a decision that the Executive Team and trustees have taken seriously, aware that this isn't a route the

organisation has taken before and one that needs to be thought through carefully and with a clear sense of stewardship of the funds God has already given us.

We have been talking with some banks about options for borrowing and some investment companies about leasing – a common approach to building new care homes. Leasing companies will fund the buildings and the operator – in this case Pilgrims' Friend Society – will make the building a home.

"We are taking care to ensure that the organisations we do business with understand our Christian heritage and our desire to create Christian communities in which older people flourish," says Julian. "We are passionate about the way our Christian communities support and encourage older people on their faith journey and we want to do our bit to make sure God's work thrives long into the future. The cost of building a new home has increased significantly in recent years and where charitable income used to enable us to invest in the future we now need greater financial investment. The only way we can confidently build for the future and so sustain the mission for

generations to come is to explore options such as loans and leasing."

Of course, leases and loans are still business transactions and any funds which are provided by these companies will be paid back over the coming years (just like with domestic mortgages), but we are making sure that that financial burden can be borne by our operational income in the long-term.

Yesterday, today, and tomorrow

While there is much to consider with the growth of the work of Pilgrims' Friend Society, one thing is unchanging – God is at the heart of all we do, He has been since 1807, and He will always be.

We have recently been reflecting on this verse from Isaiah:

Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, **'This is the way; walk in it.'** (Isaiah 30:21)

We pray continually for God's guidance with listening ears and confidence that He will show us the way, we are certain that He will tell us which way to turn.

Things to pray for:

- The existing care and community in our homes and housing schemes, especially where buildings are ageing and make delivering great care harder
- Our newest homes and those we hope to welcome in the future
- Our trustees and Executive Team

To find out more about the Growth and Renewal Programme, www.pilgrimsfriend.org.uk/renewal-programme

How *dementia friendly* is your church?

Sophie Duncan is an ordinand in the Diocese of Bristol and has recently completed an MA in practical theology at Sarum College, focusing on dementia and faith. Ahead of a speaking event with our partner charity Faith in Later Life, she explores how we can help make our churches places of welcome for those living with dementia

With nearly 950,000 people living with dementia in the UK, churches face a challenge: how to remain inclusive of those affected. Whilst many congregations aspire to be dementia friendly, the reality is that people living with dementia, as well as those who live alongside them, often become isolated from their church communities.

Dementia is an umbrella term for various conditions, the most common being Alzheimer's. It's not a natural part of ageing and affects individuals in diverse ways, including memory loss and difficulties with processing information. Media portrayals often reinforce negative stereotypes, but it is possible to live well with dementia.

Maintaining meaningful connections, especially within a faith community, can be profoundly beneficial. People living with dementia are cherished by God and are an important part of the body of Christ.

When a friend was diagnosed with dementia, she began to find church overwhelming and eventually stopped attending. Initially she remained connected through visits from church members, but over time these dwindled and eventually stopped — not from lack of love, but from uncertainty about how to engage. Many didn't know how to interact with someone who might not recognise them, or didn't appreciate the value of a visit that the person might not remember.

Therefore, being a dementia friendly church requires thoughtful changes in worship, pastoral care, and church activity. At its heart is considering how people living with dementia can actively contribute to and be embraced by the church, and what this looks like as dementia progresses.

> *"Smiling, making eye contact, remembering names, all help.'*

A key part of being dementia friendly starts with the services. Getting the welcome right is a good start. Smiling, making eye contact, remembering names, all help. Try to avoid questions that rely on short-term memory, like "How was your week?" as these can be difficult to answer for someone living with dementia. Educating the congregation about dementia helps foster empathy. Having a "buddy" to sit with someone during services can offer comfort and support, both to the individual and their carer. It also allows carers to connect with others, knowing their loved one is cared for.

The physical environment matters too. Clear signage, contrasting toilet fixtures, accessible pathways, and strong safeguarding practices all contribute to a more navigable and safe space.

Services can be improved by using straightforward language; ensuring everything needed is included in one large print booklet; offering images or props to guide participants through the service; using familiar liturgy, such as the Lord's Prayer; and including hymns familiar to those living with dementia. Consider if and how to talk about dementia in sermons and prayers, emphasising God's love of people living with dementia, whilst not sanitising some of the hard realities. Providing space for lament and sorrow can be important, for example incorporating silence and music.

Avoid judging worship solely by visible responses. Presence and participation may take many forms. I've often seen people living with dementia participate, for example, by comforting someone else or joining in a hymn despite usually being non-verbal, but also know God is ministering in ways that we cannot see.

Helpful scaffolding can support someone to continue their ministry, for example, encouraging people to contribute to the prayers by offering examples to follow, or putting picture labels on the cupboard doors to help someone put away the coffee cups.

These are great ways to start becoming inclusive of people living with dementia — but church is more than services. To be dementia friendly means thinking holistically about how to support someone who isn't present in services, ensuring they remain connected to church family.

Communication requires creativity and sensitivity. Rather than asking questions, engage in familiar topics and allow space for the person living with dementia to join in. Go with the flow of the conversation and listen to their views. Recognise that behind every expression is a need, which might not be immediately apparent, and respond with compassion.

Approach each interaction with wonder, expecting God to work through those living with dementia. Remember they are active members of the church, included by God. Notice when they're absent and continue visiting even if they don't remember your name. And don't forget carers — they need love and support as they walk with a loved one with dementia.

The church is enriched by the inclusion of people living with dementia. Standing against the dominant societal narratives, the church affirms the value and humanity of all those who live with dementia. A dementia friendly church is not just accessible—it's intentional, compassionate, and committed to seeing every person as a vital part of God's family.

Faith in Later Life

ONLINE EVENT

DEMENTIA FRIENDLY CHURCH

22ND JANUARY

Sophie Duncan will be exploring this topic in a webinar as part of Faith in Later Life's regular programme for Church Champions. Everyone is welcome to join and there will be two time slots available, 1.30pm and 7.30pm. Free booking is via

faithinlaterlife.org/events

Get your Free resource

Six Key Steps to Making a Dementia Inclusive Church

We have 100 copies of this resource to give away absolutely free!

Old age is part of God's life design, intended as a time of blessing (2 Timothy 1:7) for the person and for the church (Job 12:12, Proverbs 23:22–23). But it can also be a time of physical frailty, including dementia, which is largely a disease of old age. Spiritual support and encouraging an individual's relationship with Jesus improves their well-being, and that of the families who are caring for them.

Presented as a booklet, this resource distils the experience of fellowships that have stepped up to the plate in including those who are living with dementia. It describes six key steps that enable a church to be truly relevant for people with dementia and their families, and how it works best when it is intentional, with dedicated leaders.

To request your resource, please email **info@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk** with your name and postal address and put **'Free dementia resource'** in the subject heading. Alternatively, give us a call on **0300 303 1403**.

Meet a housekeeping manager... Elliot

Elliot's much-loved nan Lucy was the second person to come and live at Bridgemead, our care home in Bath. He shares how as housekeeping manager he honours his '32 grandparents' just as he would his nan

My nan was a strong-minded and inspirational lady. She was a deacon at her church (Elm Church on Charlotte Street) and was one of the people who pushed to get this place built. In her earlier life, she worked for the Admiralty, starting out in Whitehall before being posted to Bath. She worked at the Empire Hotel, which the Admiralty had taken over.

Nan never stopped pushing for the things she believed in. It's thanks to her that there's so many "dipped" pavements in Bath. To get to the chemist, she was having to take a massive detour on her mobility scooter, so she campaigned to get dipped pavements introduced.

As a teenager, I used to come and visit Nan at Bridgemead. My brother Justin and I came every week to give her a lift to church. Her room was number 202 and whenever I step in there I'm hit by pure nostalgia.

Nan passed away in 1997 and so I stopped visiting Bridgemead. However, a few years later I was working for a cleaning agency and got sent to Bridgemead on shifts. I then worked in hospitality, front of house at The Francis Hotel, and I also did landscape gardening.

One day, I got a call from Bridgemead asking if I wanted a permanent role. It was in the middle of the 2008 stock market crash and I thought working in a care home would be a nice, secure job and as my partner had just given birth to our son I said 'yes'.

I've now been here 17 years. I was a kitchen assistant at first and then when the chef got ill I covered and ended up cooking for five years. I was then offered the role of housekeeping manager.

The way I see it is I have 32 grandparents. Each of them deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, just as I would my own nan. Making sure someone's room is clean and tidy is an important part of that. We also take care over people's laundry. There are some 'family members' [as we call those who live with us] who like to have their trousers ironed in a certain way with a crease down the front. It's all part of the service.

I run a tight ship. My team sometimes tease me and say 'are you checking up on me?' They know I'm regimental. When you go into someone's room, you shouldn't see any cobwebs, when you run your finger along the skirting board (which I do), you shouldn't find any dust. And to be fair, my team are outstanding – I can't fault them!

Insects are the bane of our life. The summer months can be a nightmare. At sunset especially you notice them – when the sun is low you see all these shadows of bugs descending. Then there's the ants. They are attracted to food and sometimes people will keep a little stash and forget where it is. Easter can be tricky as there's so much chocolate about.

Fun fact
Elliot plays the African drums

In his spare time, Elliot likes:

- listening to music
- watching sport, especially football and rugby
- going fishing

One thing I love about my role is hearing the stories of those living with us. There was an amazing lady called Rosemary who used to play the piano on a cruise ship, and another gentleman called Tom who used to teach at the Royal Academy of Music. Elton John was one of his students and he used to say that he had bad habits! We also have Stan, a Normandy veteran. It's just amazing.

The support of our 'family members' has also helped me get through some tough times. Last year, I lost my brother to cancer. There's a lady living here called Margaret who also lost her son to cancer. She understood what it was like to be grieving and said that it takes time. It was brutal but working here got me through it.

Being around older people gives me perspective. Many of them have health challenges but you see them soldiering on through things that are difficult. Seeing how they carry on stops me complaining.

CARING TO THE *end*

Christians in Care, an initiative of Pilgrims' Friend Society, has been running end of life care training for our carers and those working across the care sector. Lucy Honeysett, a palliative care nurse and Lead Coordinator of Christians in Care, explains

Over recent months, the media has highlighted the desperate and legitimate need for hospices to receive increased funding and resource as they provide end of life care. And yet we know from the latest government statistics on palliative and end of life care that more people die in care homes, nursing homes and in their own home than in a hospice. It's likely that most of this care is delivered by carers, some of whom haven't been given end of life care training, but every day and every night do the very best they can to care for the dying and extend this compassion and support to relatives and to one another.

Last year, I visited a dear friend who lived in a care home. She was well loved and well looked after but had deteriorated over several weeks and was now unconscious and in the final moments of life but didn't seem settled. She was in pain, and it was very hard to see her like this. The carers were unsure what to do. Her pastor from her old church happened to be visiting at the same time and thankfully, in God's timing, we were able to remain with her, holding her hand and reassuring her that we'd do all we could to help. We contacted the GP and nurse, and my friend was reassessed and given much needed pain relief. We prayed for her, and she seemed much more comfortable and peaceful before she died. I also did what I could to support the carers. But this visit stayed with me and added to a growing sense that there was a need for more end of life care training for carers.

> *"During this training, we covered the importance of good communication, planning ahead and exploring and recording people's wishes.*

Wonderfully, end of life care is a priority at Pilgrims' Friend Society. Earlier this year, I contributed to the charity's ongoing end of life care training at the Senior Carers' Conference. During this training, we covered the importance of good communication, planning ahead and exploring and recording people's wishes. We talked about resuscitation and how to spot the signs of deterioration, and also about responding to changing needs and caring for someone who is dying. We covered the importance of involving and supporting relatives, and of caring for ourselves and one another. It was a wonderful day, and I felt privileged to be with a group of experienced carers so committed to getting this right and doing the very best they can to care for 'family members' (as we call those who live with us) and their loved ones.

As well as supporting Pilgrims' Friend Society staff, over the past year I have also delivered five end of life care training days on Zoom in my role at Christians in Care. These sessions were open to carers of all faiths and none.

As a Christians in Care community, we have shared our experiences of caring for dying people as part of our regular meetings and over our WhatsApp group. Some of these memories have remained painful for carers, with many questions about suffering, understanding and managing symptoms, diagnosing dying, supporting relatives and caring for a dying person. I could see that God was opening an opportunity for me to respond in love and share the passion and experience that He's given me to pass on to carers in the wider community.

By the end of the year, over 100 carers will have received this training. We will continue to offer this free training next year and pray that many more carers will join us and be empowered and equipped to provide the best possible standard of end-of-life care and support.

Some thoughts about end of life:

1. **Talk about the end of life before you reach the end of life.** Having early conversations, making and recording plans about what you want and don't want helps ensure your voice is heard and care remains centred around your wishes.
2. **If someone is for resuscitation, when their heart or lungs naturally stop working, a resuscitation attempt must be made, an ambulance called, and the person is transferred into hospital.** If someone wants to die at home or in a care home, a 'do not attempt cardiopulmonary resuscitation' decision is needed. We used to call this form 'Allow a natural death' but now this decision is often recorded on a ReSPECT form (Recommended Summary Plan for Emergency Care and Treatment). This isn't a form you or a loved one needs to sign, but one that a doctor or senior nurse completes that then helps guide the plan of care when someone is deteriorating and dies. You may need to ask for the important conversations needed to complete this form.
3. **The suffering some people experience and witness at the end of life isn't always physical.** In fact, with advances in medicine, most physical suffering can be managed. God has made us more than physical beings. We are spiritual, relational, social, psychological people with hurts that medication cannot always soothe. Remaining present is powerful and conversations that bring peace and healing are important. Take time to say: 'I'm sorry', 'I forgive you', 'Thank you', 'I will miss you', 'I love you'. And remember we can say this to loved ones who are too poorly to respond with words but can hear and be comforted. And we can invite God into moments like this. He draws near and by His Spirit, brings His love and grace that will comfort and redeem.
4. **If you are worried about dying or concerned about a loved one who is dying, please talk to someone providing the care**. Ask questions, ask for a review, ask for a reassessment if needed.
5. **Remember that God will never leave us, never abandon us (Deuteronomy 31:8).** Dying is an unknown journey we will all face. But it's not unknown to God and when we're in Christ, God promises to come with us. Jesus has gone ahead of us and will return to take us to be with Him (John 14:1–4) and when we're with Him in heaven, we'll be more alive than we've ever been. What a precious thought!

Christians *in* Care

Christians in Care is a growing network that offers support and ongoing encouragement for Christians who work in the care sector. To find out more, visit **www.christiansincare.org**

End of Life Care Training

If you are a carer working in the care sector come and join an interactive, online session led by an experienced palliative care nurse. Choose one of the following dates:

- **16th January 2026**
- **18th March 2026**
- **30th June 2026**
- **8th October 2026**

9.30am - 2.30pm on Zoom
Book your free place:
www.christiansincare.org/events

My Story Christina

Words: Tyler Sewell-Nicholas

Christina, 97, reflects on farmyard adventures as a child growing up in Yorkshire, and the blessings of motherhood and grandmotherhood. Today she lives at Emmaus House, Harrogate, where friendship and community bring her joy

"I loved living on the farm," Christina recalls, her eyes brightening at the memory. "We named all the horses, played in the barns, and had fun with the machinery. I loved it. But you always had to do what was necessary." Life on her grandfather's farm in Old Denaby, near Doncaster, meant chores, but for a lively little girl it also meant space to roam. Christina remembers playing with her cousins among the hay bales and sneaking peeks into the sheds where farming equipment loomed like mysterious giants.

Milking the cows was part of her everyday routine, though the real excitement often came from her older brother, Geffrey. "He was very confident, sometimes too confident," she laughs. "I used to watch him climbing onto the roof of the stables and think, 'he's going to fall,' but he never did. He was daring, and I was always keeping an eye on him."

Christina also had her fair of close calls. "I once got too close to the sack lift, which is a piece of equipment to lift bags or sacks. It gave me such a shock. I soon learned not to go near it again!"

In those early years, there was much warmth and laughter. She speaks of her mother, Constance Muriel, with great affection. "My mother was lovely. She looked after us," she says. Her father, Arthur, was also a key presence, until his sudden illness changed everything. When Christina was six, her father went to the Doncaster races. Not long after, he fell ill.

"He picked up a germ and went into hospital," she recalls quietly. "He just lived

for another six months. It was a horrible time." Arthur died in hospital in Sheffield, leaving Constance to raise Christina and her older brother, Geffrey, with the support of their grandfather.

Despite the sadness, the family pulled together. "We lived at my granddad's farm, and my mother helped with the work. She'd grown up there herself." Geffrey, though often hampered by asthma, dreamed of joining the RAF. "He always wanted to be in the RAF," she says fondly. "But his asthma stopped him. He still did well for himself later in life." The siblings remained close, bonded by loss but also by the resilience their mother taught them.

Christina started her education at Denaby village school, later moving on to senior school in Conisbrough, a short distance from the famous castle. Getting there was an adventure in itself. "The old school bus used to backfire all the way up the hill. I hated it. I always thought it would never make it!" she laughs. In the classroom, she explored her strengths. "I liked embroidery and drawing. I took pride in what I'd done," she says. "But maths? No, I never liked it. English was better, especially poetry. But needlework was my favourite." Her creative streak shone through in her projects. She remembers making cushion covers and small embroidered pieces, often receiving praise from her teachers. "They always thought I did the sewing and drawing well."

At 14, Christina took up work as a wages clerk in a builder's office. The job suited her methodical nature. "I liked doing the job I was employed to do," she says. "I liked to do things properly." She carefully logged hours and pay, ensuring that builders and labourers received fair wages for their work. She worked there until she was about 16, then moved to another office closer to town. These years were not only about work but also about friendship. "I made friends," she remembers. "We used to go for walks after work or to the pictures. It was lovely."

It was through her work that she met her future husband, Cyril. "You just take to them, don't you?" she says simply of their first meeting. Cyril had served during the war and later became a builder. Christina remembers their courtship as ordinary but steady. "It wasn't a big love story; it was just normal. But it felt right." The couple married in 1955. After their wedding, they lived first in Brampton, Doncaster, and later at Stockeld Park near Wetherby, where Cyril continued his career in construction.

Christina and Cyril had one daughter, Susan, who brought new joy into their lives. "Susan was always a little missus," Christina recalls fondly. "She never wanted to sit in the pushchair, she wanted to push it herself. Everyone in the local shops

loved seeing her, she looked so sweet." Later, Susan married and had two sons, Paul and James. Christina delights in her grandchildren. "My daughter and grandsons have all done well. I'm very proud of them," she says with a smile.

Faith has been a steady thread throughout Christina's life. As a child, she went to Sunday School at the local Church of England. "My friend and I were like little teachers to the others," she remembers. As an adult, she attended church less regularly, not out of disinterest but because life grew busy. Yet faith remained present, and today she finds strength in devotional times at Emmaus House. "I like them," she says. "They're interesting and they make you think about your life."

Christina has always loved to keep her hands and mind busy. "I like puzzles," she says, "and I enjoy doing them with other people too." Walking has also been a constant. "I've always enjoyed walking. When I was young, after work, my friend and I used to go for walks every evening, chattering about things." Music brings her joy. "I used to like Elvis," she says. "And I like country music, like Don Williams. I can listen to classical as well."

Looking back on her long life, Christina reflects with simplicity and honesty. "The hardest time was when my father died. It was terrible. But the happiest times? I liked going to work, I really did. It doesn't sound very exciting, but I enjoyed it." Her advice to younger generations is straightforward: "Be happy in whatever you're doing. If you don't like it, leave it. Money isn't everything, it's more important to enjoy your work."

Today, at Emmaus House, Christina feels at home. "It's just perfect," she says. "Everybody knows each other. I like having friends, like Ann. You couldn't do without a friend." She enjoys the activities, the homely atmosphere, and the sense of community.

At 97, Christina has lived through almost a century of change. Yet her outlook remains grounded in the everyday: pride in her work, love for her family, and gratitude for friendship and community. "I don't have any big secrets," she says. "Just everyday living. Do what you enjoy and take pride in it. That's enough."

Find out more about how we care for those living in our homes:
www.pilgrimsfriend.org.uk/thewaywecare

CONTINUED...

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