

Greenbelt offers focus on justice and creativity

FOR Jeremy and Rachel Hicks, the annual Greenbelt Festival has become an essential part of their Christian journey.

They enjoy spending the August Bank Holiday weekend camping with thousands of others and experiencing music, theatre, comedy, visual arts, worship and speakers on a range of topics.

The couple, from St John's Church, Fareham, first went to Greenbelt in the 1980s and returned after a few years away in 2011.

"One of the saddest effects of the pandemic was that for two years in a row, we were unable to go to Greenbelt," said Jeremy. "Returning in 2022 was a joyous and emotional homecoming.

"Greenbelt is a Christian arts festival, with a strong focus on faith, creativity and justice. It's an open and inclusive space where everyone is welcome, whatever they believe.

"The programme has many different strands, so there is something for everyone, including speakers on literature, Biblical teaching, environmental issues, spirituality and social justice. It's also a great place for families, with lots of activities for children.

"It has become



The Greenbelt Festival (photo: Jacob Lowe, Greenbelt); below: Rachel and Jeremy Hicks



an essential part of our Christian journey. It's a time to step outside the weekly routine of church life, and be nourished by new perspectives and fresh ideas.

We have heard inspiring speakers such as Richard Rohr, Brian McLaren and Paula Gooder,

who have challenged us to look at life and faith differently, and whose insights have fed into our preaching and discipleship. And music and words from the awesome Sunday morning."

It takes place in the grounds of Boughton House near Kettering. This year's festival will be the 50th, and runs from August 24-27.

To find out more, visit www.greenbelt.org.uk, where you can also buy your tickets.

from Church of the Ascension, St Mark's North End, and St Saviour's, Stamshaw for a joint visit. This July, they plan to go again, albeit the trip is already fully-booked. Anne Davis, from St Saviour's, Shanklin, also joined them last summer. The 74-year-old has now been there more than 50 times.

"I had a taster at the age of 16, and then I went again for the whole summer, just before going to teacher-training college," she said. "By the September, I felt called to join the novitiate of the Priory of Our Lady and stayed there for three-and-a-half years. I then moved to St Catherine's School on the island, which is run by the same sisters.

"I've been back with people from the Good Shepherd, St Saviour's, Godshill, and Holy Trinity, Ventnor, and last year went with the group from Holy Spirit, Southsea. Every time I go, there is always something new that I experience. I enjoy the services, the fellowship, and hearing other people's stories. There are euphoric moments and then moments of peace and tranquility.

"It has been essential for my faith to develop over the years, and I've been involved in setting up cells in Godshill, in Ventnor and at the Good Shepherd and St Saviour's. It was also a huge part of my spiritual growth during the pandemic, as I could join in the live-streamed Shrine prayers when we weren't able to worship in churches."

The Rev Tony Lawrence, from Ventnor, is organising an Isle of Wight group to visit in October, which is also fully booked. He'll take 44 people from 10 different churches for the island's first joint pilgrimage to Walsingham. For more details, see www.walsinghamanglican.org.uk. If you're interested in joining a pilgrimage in 2024, please contact Russell on russell.lawson9@icloud.com or Tony on tonyschickens@btinternet.com.

Meanwhile, other worshippers from across our diocese have sampled the **Camino Frances pilgrimage** across northern Spain – part of the longer Camino de Santiago. In 2016, the Rev Neil Smart and his wife Debs (pictured above)



walked some of the route towards Santiago de Compostella. Millions of pilgrims have taken this route since medieval times and hundreds of thousands still do each year.

Debs said: "On average we walked 25km each day, carrying all our stuff on our backs, through beautiful scenery, tiny empty villages, and some not so pretty outskirts of

towns. We met lovely people from all over the world. I honestly think it's one of the best things I've ever done. Having to think about what I would be carrying each day made me think about the difference between 'want' and 'need'. So much of what we think we need in life isn't really that important.

"Another huge benefit is the head space. All I needed to do each day was pack my rucksack and walk, so I had time to think about the important things – what my faith means to me, how I can live out that faith day by day – and then live it out alongside those we met, and to be alert to pray for people.

"Having now walked around 1200km on three separate pilgrimages to Santiago, I realise more and more that life is a pilgrimage – a journey to wholeness. In addition to the importance of simplicity in daily life and learning to listen better to the Holy Spirit, I recognise how important it is to follow the Way; whether the yellow arrows on the Camino, or Jesus who is the author and perfecter of our faith."



Worship at United, the New Wine annual conference

Worship, teaching and community at New Wine

IF you go to New Wine, you might find that Pete and Jan Smith are the people welcoming you to their part of the campsite.

That's because they are 'village hosts' – making sure people have all the right equipment and are introduced to those camping around them. At New Wine, you are placed in 'villages' that bring together those whose home churches are near to each other.

The couple, from Holy Rood Church in Stubbington, have been going to New Wine since 2002. It's an annual Christian festival with an emphasis on Bible teaching and spiritual gifts, which was originally started by the vicar of St Andrew's, Chorleywood, David Pytches and his wife Mary, in 1989.

For many years it met in Shepton Mallet, Somerset, but this year is taking place in Kent. Families set up tents alongside others from their own church, and attend Bible teaching meetings in the mornings and celebration events in the evenings, with prayer offered by a trained ministry team.

"We used to go to Stoneleigh Bible Week, run by New Frontiers, but that stopped and we transferred to New Wine," said Pete. "We've been every year for 20 years, except during the pandemic, when it was run digitally.

"The thing I love best is spending lots of time with others

who are from your home church, as you don't normally spend a week living alongside them. You can sit and chat about what you've learnt. There are around 50 people who come from Holy Rood.

"I also like the quality of teaching and worship. When you're worshipping alongside thousands of other people, it's a fantastic experience. Over 20 years, there have been amazing people speaking or leading worship who we'd never heard of, but who have really blessed us.

"The work with children and young people is phenomenal, and when our three girls were growing up, it was life-changing for them. They could do fun things such as gunk tanks and paintballing, alongside the spiritual side and being prayed for. They could be in groups with hundreds of people their age.

"We do enjoy being village hosts, because the first day when everyone arrives is hectic. People are trying to set up tents and work out where everything is, so making sure everyone is OK is rewarding."

As well as their annual summer conferences, the New Wine network also organises events throughout the rest of the year, including within our diocese.

If you're interested in booking to attend this summer's New Wine, you can find details on www.new-wine.org