

# We found purpose and relief from anxiety

**Margaret Bower and Serena Meah** were both suffering. But they discovered Christ Church, Sandown, and loved its Alpha Course

**Who are you?** We are Margaret and Serena, plus Vinni the dog. All three of us were on the Alpha Course run by Christ Church, Sandown.

**Why did you start going there?**

*Margaret:* In July 2023, my daughter Lisa died unexpectedly. I'd already lost my husband during the Covid pandemic. I lost my sense of purpose, wasn't talking to anyone and felt like a zombie. I was in a bad place.

In November 2023, I walked past Christ Church and saw a sign saying it was a 'warm space'. I plucked up the courage to go inside and Tiena the churchwarden met me. I decided to come on the Sunday morning and have been coming ever since.

The Alpha Course was brilliant for me, and I gained so much from the videos that explained all the background, and by talking to others. We went to Carisbrooke Priory for the away day and I now volunteer there in the tea room.

*Serena:* I had been living in Southampton and moved to the Isle of Wight. Every Monday I walked from Shanklin to Sandown and one day I saw the notice outside Christ Church saying 'Dogs welcome'



**Margaret and Serena with Vinni the dog**

My dog Vinni is important to me, as I suffer from anxiety and he is like a therapy dog – I stroke him and it calms me down. I went in and met people who said they were running an Alpha Course that night. It included dinner, so I went along. I met a lovely bunch of people and felt very welcome.

I'd done Alpha before but never completed it, as I get very tired, especially in the evenings. But when I went into the church I

felt so comfortable, as if I'd come home. I'd always been a Christian but struggled with aspects of faith. I'd been blaming God, but the Alpha Course gave me the headspace to realise that things aren't God's fault – he gives humans free will and they hurt each other.

**What do you love about the church?**

*Margaret:* When my husband was ill, we used to go to another church where the worship was more formal. So I'd never known anything else. But here it is different, more informal in a way that helps you to interact. Sunday morning now feels like home. I've now joined a home group, where you can also talk about what really matters to people who care.

*Serena:* One big thing was feeling an overwhelming sense of the Holy Spirit on the awayday at Carisbrooke Priory. I felt a real peace. And recently I've thought: I can't remember the last time I was anxious - I used to feel anxiety every day. I also don't feel lonely. The people here are genuinely pleased to see you.

I knew I was happier, but couldn't work out why. And of course people had prayed for me. I've learnt to put God first. People have been shocked at how much I've changed.