

GOD'S LIQUORICE ALLSORTS

St Luke & St Peter, Southsea, Church Weekend Away

19 – 21st October 2018 at Ashburnham Place, Battle



Annie McCabe
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Southsea

On a glorious October weekend when the sun shone, the sky was piercing blue and the colours of the autumn leaves laid a lush carpet, we set out on an adventure! The first church weekend away for the parish of St Luke's since it reopened its doors after years of closure.

Our church is one those little ordinary Christian communities so close to the heart of Resource's mission and ministry. Located in Portsmouth City Centre surrounded by high rise, we worship in one of the poorest (materially) Anglican parishes in England. Green space is not to be found in our urban context, so the opportunity to spend a weekend in the beauty of the Sussex countryside was not to be missed.

Some had never been out of the city before or for a long time. Some had saved hard to find the money to come. Some had quietly given extra to enable others to come. One person came because she had won on the bingo and chose to use that money for her place at the weekend! God knows the heart with which we come and the sacrifices it may have meant. There were forty people who went. Diverse in ages, backgrounds and spiritual experience. A real bunch of "God's liquorice allsorts" in keeping with the theme of the weekend.

I worked with Kevin on the focus of teaching and drew in help to strengthen the worship. We also benefitted from the prayer support of Resource intercessors before and during the weekend itself. The teaching came from 1 Peter. We are *chosen people, blessed people, holy people* and *loved people* of God. The themes resonated with so many of us. Anne and Kevin's styles of teaching are different and complementary. This enabled each of us, with different life experience, temperament and levels of literacy, to engage and be open to the Holy Spirit.

One of them was Janice. Part time cleaner, mum and grandma. Janice lives with the scars of a complicated past. Her deep and humble faith has been her rock through the turbulence. Her confidence grew as she experienced the love of God through the Holy Spirit. She received new gifts of the Holy Spirit that are still helping her to face the challenges that life is throwing her. Others experienced the healing presence of the Holy Spirit and received gifts to build up the body.

Resource offers a gentle, genuine, experience of charismatic ministry sensitively taking people out of their comfort zones. For some new to faith, this meant a safe space to receive prayer and experience more of God's transforming love and peace. For one couple who had missed out before, the igniting of new passion in their faith. This has led to them stepping into new roles of service in the church. For some wary of the Spirit from past experiences of insensitive or disingenuous ministry elsewhere, the recovery of a receptivity and confidence in the power of the Spirit.

The lasting impact of the weekend has been evident. There has been no "us and them" division based on who went on the weekend and who did not. In fact, God blessed those who worshipped at St Luke's that Sunday with a rich and encouraging experience too. Thankfully there was no sense of deflation coming back to church after "a mountain top" experience. But it has meant deeper relationships and for many a new openness to the Holy Spirit. We continue our relationship of support, encouragement and prayer with Resource with gratitude!

Annie McCabe