

# Putting church life in the picture

Paul Handley celebrates the beauty, warmth, and accomplishment of our competition entries

IN AUGUST, the *Church Times*, together with ChurchCare, launched a photo competition, "Life and Soul". ChurchCare is the C of E body that supports all those looking after cathedrals and church buildings (see panel overleaf), but the idea was to focus not so much on the architecture as on the people and the activities that take place in and around it.

We set three categories: worship and prayer; community activities; and the "Chelfie" (you, your church, and its people).

We received about 180 entries, mostly in the first two categories. For the third, perhaps we didn't explain clearly enough that we were particularly looking for a selfie taken in a church. Certainly, nobody sent one.

Joining me on the judging panel was Eamonn McCabe, picture editor of *The Guardian*; the Revd Malcolm Doney, *Church Times* features editor; and Catherine Townsend and Dr Gabriel Byng, from ChurchCare. The Bishop of Worcester, Dr John Inge, the lead bishop for cathedrals and church buildings, couldn't be at the meeting, but sent his preferences. They were, naturally, always treated with respect by the rest of us...

In most cases, though, we deferred to Eamonn, who proved able to assess the worth of a photo in a split second. There were a few basic criteria: focus, lighting, composition. Several entries fell at these first hurdles, but that left a strong field contending for the prizes.

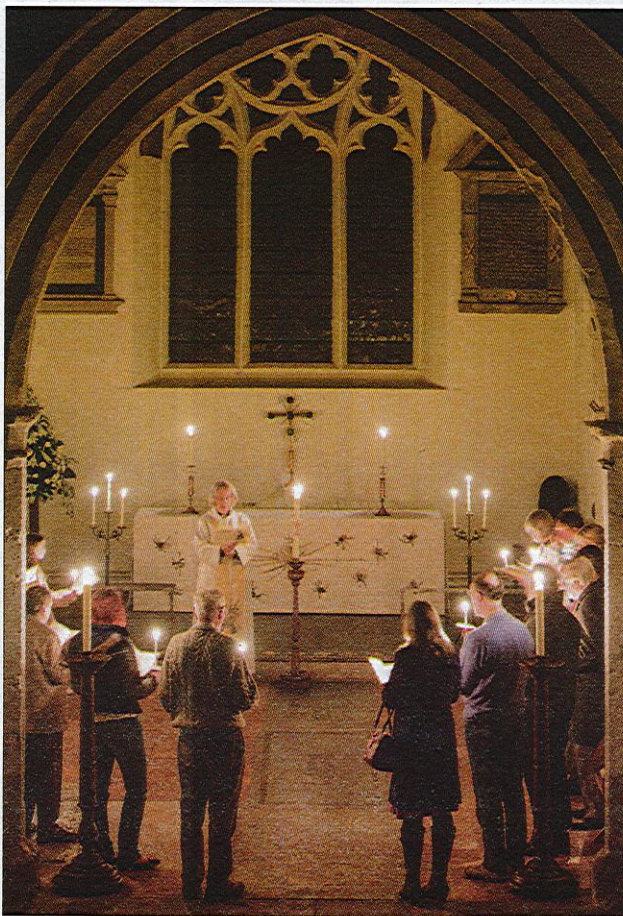
The next criteria, though, were drama, story, and warmth. Eamonn was looking for images that would catch not only the readers' eyes but their imagination. Thus human interaction scored higher than perfect composition.

Regarding the winners: Ian Wyllie's winning entry of a renewal of baptismal vows, in the worship and prayer category, is well lit and crisply focused; but beyond the accomplishment of the shot is the pleasure we derive from the woman's expression: shocked but with a touch of joyfulness. Who can look at this and not smile?

The winner in the community-activities section was a photograph of dancing in Wakefield Cathedral by Harriet Evans. The picture has both architectural style and human interaction in spades. Many picture editors might crop out the figure on the extreme right, but it populates the foreground, draws down the colour of the chancel ceiling, and, in any case, when was there ever a



Above: Winner, category: Worship and prayer, Highfield Church, renewal of baptismal vows, by Ian Wyllie; right: Commended, category: Worship and prayer, St James's, Shere, Holy Saturday service, by Jonathan Cross



dance without somebody looking on longingly?

Disappointment at our failure to attract any selfies was assuaged by what we did see in the third category, images of churches and their communities. Kora Norbury's winning shot of the congregation of St James's, Gatley, summarised this, focused on the churchyard, that permeable space where church and community meet. Eamonn was impressed by the depth of the focus on a dull day, the animation of the crowd, and the (slightly lucky) arrangement of the balloons, obscuring neither faces nor signs.

In the following pages, we have also included some pictures, which we commend simply because they made us smile.

Dr Inge said afterwards: "The entries provided the judging panel with a wonderful flavour of the vibrant and varied life inside church buildings, and included worshippers and volunteers.

"The winning images are a fitting visual summary of our 'Open and Sustainable' initiative [see panel], in which we encourage the shared use of church buildings, and their use to engage with and serve their communities."

More photos overleaf