

The Rector's Pint – September 2025

This month, I am joining with our Lay Minister, Toby Garfitt, to share a few thoughts about our friend and colleague, Tony Jefferis, who died a few weeks ago.

I would like to begin by acknowledging both Tony and Toby in their roles as Licensed Lay Ministers in our churches. I speak for all as I acknowledge their wisdom which has consistently been displayed in their teaching and preaching.

Tony sudden critical illness following a walking holiday in the Dolomites, and his death in the JR in Oxford a fortnight later, came as an enormous shock. I would like to pay a personal tribute to Tony, who over nearly ten years became a hugely valued colleague and friend. Tony's integrity and consistency in his faith has been an inspiration to us all.

Whenever possible, Tony, Toby, and I met every Wednesday morning to pray. This time together was precious, and coming to terms with the fact that Tony is no longer with us has been a hard adjustment. Tony's influence was also far reaching in the medical world, his Christian faith and values informing all that he did as a doctor, senior consultant and ongoing advisor and teacher, not least, when he was able, in Gaza. Our prayer times together were always informed!

I will miss Tony, as a colleague and a friend. I will miss his quick sense of humour, sharing ministry with him, and I will even miss his notoriously out-of-tune singing!

Simon

I think of Tony as someone who liked planning and doing and moving forward, in accordance with his faith. He believed that the understanding of Christian truth should find expression in godly action, so his sermons usually ended with some positive thoughts on practical application. Last year I went with him to a 'churchyard day' organized by the diocese, to learn about the needs and opportunities of caring for our churchyards. We also made a joint visit to Bishop Gavin, to talk about how to move forward either in our current capacity as Licensed Lay Ministers (aka Lay Readers – not everyone knew that Tony was a Trustee of the Central Readers' Council of the Church of England), or in some form of ordained ministry.

Tony was always very well prepared, for sermons or expeditions or whatever was asked of him. I remember one particularly wet Good Friday Walk round the villages, when he was the only one to have really waterproof protection. The rest of us got soaked to the skin!

And I believe he was well prepared for death. Of course, the timing of it was a surprise and a shock, but Tony's whole life had been a preparation for a good death. He could say, with St Paul, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Timothy 1.12).

Here are some lines from a French poem that I translated. They sum up my feelings at this time about my dear friend Tony, who is safe with Jesus:

Death: to be celebrated like a birth

For such a friend: that's what he would have wanted.

Since we have shared this secret brotherhood,

Why should we fear the gulf that came between?

Toby