

'Songs of Praise' Event - Holy Trinity Church, Westcott
Sunday, 10th June

Received wisdom from past High Sheriffs, is for the incoming High Sheriff to have a clear focus for the year. This helps enormously in prioritising the inevitable diary clashes, but more importantly means that all of the effort during the year has a chance of making an impact, however superficial and fleeting. My focus will be the issue of children and young people being permanently excluded from schools across Surrey. The terrible link between such exclusions and future involvement with the police, courts and prisons is unarguable.

Now, whether I will be able to make a difference remains to be seen, but the relevance for our service today, is my reason for selecting this complex and difficult theme as my focus.

Cath and I both come from loving families, in Leeds and Newcastle respectively, who had very little in the way of money. And yet we received exceptional schooling and were able to progress to university, where we both met - all entirely on the basis of what was right for us as young people, and nothing whatsoever to do with wealth. We were inspired by teachers, lecturers and friends from totally diverse backgrounds and countries. We enjoyed opportunities to glimpse possible futures that we had never imagined, even in our widest dreams - in short, it completely changed our lives.

I believe it is our collective duty to ensure that all children and young people have access to such opportunities. None should have such inspirational moments denied to them. And we must always remember that it will be a totally individual spark that will make the difference for each of them - perhaps in sport, music, singing, dancing, science, engineering, apprenticeships, church, civil and military service - who knows?

Throughout my schooling, one Song of Praise was always sung at key assemblies and celebrations. That same hymn followed us to university, where it was our anthem at formal student events - indeed, I seem to have known the words all of my life. It speaks to me of hope, of opportunity and particularly of Inspiration.

Our Song of Praise is Jerusalem.