

CHRISTIAN FOCUS



Autumn 2021

Magazine of the Church in Abingdon –
A partnership of fourteen churches
www.church-in-abingdon.org.uk

WELCOME BACK!



ALSO:

Café@35 – 35 Ock Street

Abingdon Good Neighbour Scheme

Art Exhibition at 35 Ock Street

Enneagram Workshop

... and more

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DEADLINE FOR COPY FOR THE WINTER ISSUE IS 1ST NOVEMBER 2021

Please send copy to the Editor, preferably by email (benjeapes@gmail.com) in MS Word format.

A typical one-page article with no pictures is about 350 words, but we are happy to take longer contributions. We reserve the right to edit to fit space available.

Pictures are greatly appreciated. They should be sent as separate graphic files. Please contact the Editor or your church representative for alternative methods of delivery.

ELECTRONIC COPY: If you would like to receive *Christian Focus* electronically (as a PDF, sent by email), please contact the CiA administrator at dhmcknight@aol.com.

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WELCOME BACK!

**Ben Jeapes (Christ Church on Long
Furlong)**



Welcome back to *Christian Focus*. This is the first issue in over a year – and that was our first break in forty years of publishing. It took a pandemic ...

The pandemic is rather an elephant in the room, as far as this issue is concerned – we all know it's there but we are making a determined effort not to talk about it. We take it for granted that no one has exactly enjoyed the last 18 months – though some have had better experiences than others – so there doesn't seem much point rehashing old miseries. We want to look ahead. It is fine to look back if we are identifying past blessings, but otherwise we look ahead expectantly to future ones.

What we don't do is expect life to go back to precisely how it was before the pandemic. One of the more egregiously misquoted verses in the Bible is Jeremiah 29.11. The people of Israel have been taken into captivity and want nothing more than to go back home, back to their old lives. God tells them: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Taken out of context, as it frequently is in the modern world, this can be taken to mean that everything will turn out okay. But, reading the verses before and after, it becomes clear it is part of a different message. "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." (Jeremiah 29:5-7)

God is telling the people of Israel that things are *not* going back to normal. This is the *new* normal and they are in it for the long term. He expects them to work to make it work.

A general rule in life is that you can't just back to how things were – but then, neither could the Jerusalem authorities after they thought they had got rid of Jesus. A new normal is not always a bad thing. Let's assume God is with us throughout all this, and look forward joyfully to finding out what he has in mind for us.

CAFÉ@35 – 35 OCK STREET

Jill Millgate (ABC)

It was on 17th March 2020 that we took the sad decision to close 35 Ock Street and Abingdon Baptist Church due to the pandemic. Looking back, we thought it would probably be for up to twelve weeks! How little did we realise what would unfold!



Church groups went online (once we overcame the technical challenges), but of course our café could not do the same. For many this was a huge loss, especially for those not online, but also for those who relied on people contact, friendship and a place of safety to enjoy the delights being served. The place was empty and sad, whereas before it was brimming with life and laughter.

With plenty of guidelines being received from Government and our Baptist Union, lots of work went into getting 35 Ock Street (and the church) ready for when we could open our doors once again. It was a minefield, but we got there, and our thanks and sincere gratitude go to Stephen Bodey for doing much of the hard graft to get us to that point with the installation of hand sanitisers, one-way systems, two-metre markings, reducing the number of tables and chairs, and the introduction of our own QR code! On top of all this, there was the matter of training our dedicated volunteers in a new way of working, table service, getting to grips with new technology for payment, and the track and trace system, as well as increased wiping down surfaces etc.

On Monday 26th October the excitement, together with a tinge of nervousness, was very evident as we prepared to welcome people back into 35 Ock Street; with the bunting gently waving in the breeze, we were delighted to see that by 10.25 a.m. a small group of people were already gathering! By the end of the two-hour session, eighteen people had come through the doors to rekindle and experience the friendly atmosphere of Café@35. It was wonderful to hear the sound of chatter and laughter and to see not only 'old' friends returning, but new folk too. Day One was busy – a learning curve, yes, but oh so good! However, this warm feeling was to be short-lived as the pandemic gathered pace and we had to close after a week. We did manage to open again in December, but after closing for Christmas we remained closed for what turned out to be another five months, re-opening on 17th May this year. We are pleased to confirm that from 1st September we will be fully open from 10.30 a.m. to 2.00 p.m. (so, light lunches are back on the menu)!

You may have seen our smart new feather flag outside 35 Ock Street with our new name – Café@35. We've been serving the community for almost 25 years (our silver anniversary will be celebrated in September). It's an important ministry of Abingdon Baptist Church which is supported by the Church in Abingdon, with our dedicated volunteers coming from many of the churches in the town, surrounding area and the local community.

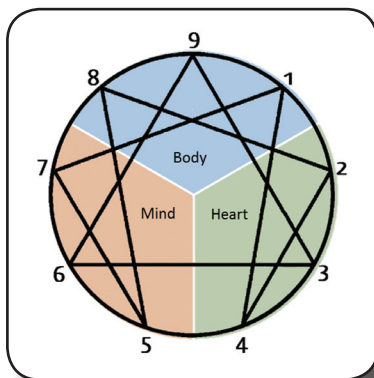
Are you looking for a new challenge – looking to serve the community? If so, would you consider joining us? Over the past two years several of our long serving volunteers have had to step down, and therefore we are seeking new people to join us – you will become part of a positive and supportive group, where friendships are made whilst serving the community. To find out more, please contact Stephen Bodey on 01235 527828.



THE ENNEAGRAM

Andrew Turner (Christ Church)

“The enneagram is a powerful and exciting tool in our ongoing journey towards self-awareness, transformation and understanding others, originating with the desert mothers and fathers in the fourth century who discerned what blocked our relationship with ourselves, with others and with God. Derived from the Greek words for nine (ennea) and written symbol (grammos), the nine types of the enneagram symbol represent different ways of relating to ourselves, others and the world. Each of the different types think, feel and act in different ways arising from the differing motivations we all have.



A psychological and spiritual model, it helps us to move beyond the strategies we use because of our life experiences and upbringing. Investing in learning about the enneagram will help us to climb out of the box we have created for ourselves. Not only that, but it can transform the way we relate professionally to work colleagues, and also privately to friends, family, spouses and children as we understand them and ourselves better. It is a model that has been used across the world and transcends nationality, gender, religion and culture. It helps us to live more compassion-filled lives.

Your journey starts with finding out your own ‘type’. Once you know which type you lead with you can understand better your motivations and drivers, how they benefit you and where they trip you up. These can help you understand how you show up in the world and come across to others. Once you understand and are aware of your own type in action, you can start exploring your own development and growth.

We teach the enneagram using the narrative tradition, which is about learning through hearing from each other, since people from each type are themselves the best at describing their own inner worlds, struggles, beliefs, strengths and paths of development. It is an incredibly powerful way of learning.”


– Helen Watts (www.WattsYourPathway.co.uk)

An initial 'Discover your Enneagram Type' day will be held in the autumn on Saturday 23rd October, led by Helen Watts and Jeanie Honey. If Covid regulations permit, it is intended that this will be 'in person' in the New Barn at Christ Church, Northcourt Road – otherwise we will be able to do this on Zoom. If you are interested, please sign up online at <https://cca.churchsuite.co.uk/events/hz2uvmsl>. This has a number limit on it, so will not become overbooked. The cost for the day (10:00 – 16:30) will be £15 per person. Further details will be provided on booking.

BEATITUDES


FOR A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO STAY INDOORS




FOR THEY HAVE PROTECTED OTHERS

BLESSED ARE THE UNEMPLOYED AND THE SELF-EMPLOYED




FOR THEIR NEED OF GOD IS GREAT

BLESSED ARE THE CORNER SHOPKEEPERS



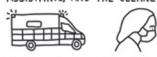
FOR THEY ARE THE PURVEYORS OF SCARCE THINGS

BLESSED ARE THE DELIVERY DRIVERS AND THE POSTAL WORKERS




FOR THEY ARE THE BRINGERS OF ESSENTIAL THINGS

BLESSED ARE THE HOSPITAL WORKERS, THE AMBULANCE CREWS, THE DOCTORS, THE NURSES, THE CARE ASSISTANTS, AND THE CLEANERS




FOR THEY STAND BETWEEN US AND THE GRAVE, AND THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS SURELY THEIRS

BLESSED ARE THE CHECKOUT WORKERS




FOR THEY HAVE PATIENCE AND FORTITUDE IN THE FACE OF OVERWORK AND FRUSTRATION

BLESSED ARE THE REFUSE COLLECTORS




FOR THEY WILL SEE GOD DESPITE THE MOUNTAINS OF WASTE

BLESSED ARE THE TEACHERS




FOR THEY REMAIN STEADFAST AND CONSTANT IN DISTURBING TIMES

BLESSED ARE THE CHURCH WORKERS; THE DEACONS, PRIESTS AND BISHOPS




FOR THEY ARE A COMFORTING PRESENCE IN A HURTING WORLD AS THEY CONTINUE TO SIGNPOST TOWARDS GOD

BLESSED ARE THE SINGLE PARENTS.




FOR THEY ARE COPING ALONE WITH THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES AND THERE IS NO RESPITE

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE ALONE.




FOR THEY ARE CHILDREN OF GOD AND WITH HIM THEY WILL NEVER BE LONELY

BLESSED ARE THE BEREAVED.




FOR WHOM THE WORST HAS ALREADY HAPPENED. THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE ISOLATED WITH THEIR ABUSERS



FOR ONE DAY - WE PRAY - THEY WILL KNOW SAFETY

BLESSED ARE ALL DURING THIS TIME WHO HAVE PURE HEARTS; ALL WHO STILL HUNGER AND THIRST FOR JUSTICE; ALL WHO WORK FOR PEACE AND WHO MODEL MERCY



MAY YOU KNOW COMFORT, MAY YOU KNOW CALM. AND MAY THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THE LOVE OF GOD, AND THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, BE WITH US ALL. AMEN

TEXT: JAYNE MANFREDI

CartoonChurch.com

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ABINGDON GOOD NEIGHBOUR SCHEME

Judith Keymer (ABC)



Abingdon Good Neighbour Scheme (AGNS) began about ten years ago. The initial idea came from the Oxfordshire County Council Community Development Team. Colin Pattenden (who was the Community Missioner at Abingdon Baptist Church at the time) and others took the idea to a meeting of the Neighbourhood Action Group. A meeting was opened up to the wider public, which included members of the Neighbourhood Police and Neighbourhood Watch. From this meeting, a steering group was formed, and the rest is history!

AGNS initially began helping elderly, vulnerable, isolated and disabled people in their own homes in North East Abingdon. This soon included all of Abingdon. We have about 70 volunteers who help meet various requests for help for mainly elderly residents. These people are referred to AGNS by social workers, hospitals and social prescribers who operate from doctors' surgeries; some also self-refer.

The members of the committee and one other lady are on a weekly rota to be a point of contact by means of our dedicated AGNS mobile phone. They also have the AGNS computer which is used to receive requests and referrals for help for neighbours (as we call the person wanting help), and to send requests to the volunteers. When a referral is made, two committee members will visit the neighbour and an assessment is made. This is when we find out what help is needed and discuss the best time of day for the volunteer to visit.

There are many things we can help with. Our main request is for befriending, which usually means visiting the neighbour for a chat, or if possible going out for a coffee or a short walk. We can help with form filling, sorting letters, shopping, basic DIY, using the Internet, small gardening tasks and much more! One of the more unusual tasks was to take a neighbour's dog to have his claws trimmed! Luckily the dog was quite happy to go with the volunteer and behaved very well!

We are always eager to recruit new volunteers, so if you feel you could help by sparing maybe an hour a week to visit a lonely person or do some shopping, then please get in touch.

Our email is gns.nea@gmail.com and the website is www.neagns.co.uk.

Stop press: we were awarded the Queens Award for Voluntary Service in September!



THE SANCTUARY

*An open community of honesty and hope
providing support, friendship and activities for all*

The Salvation Army
12 West St Helen St
Abingdon
OX14 5BL
01235 523568



*Journeying
together*

Every Wednesday from 18th Aug 10am-2pm

The Salvation Army Abingdon Community Church, 12 West St Helen Street, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, OX14 5BL. Registered Charity No. 234779 and in Scotland SC008886. Social Trust Registered Charity No. 231174 and in Scotland SC077905. General: Rt Rev. Public, National Commissioner for the United Kingdom with the Republic of Ireland: Commissioners Anthony Cressell

Think forty years hence.

What did you do in Lockdown, Grandma?

I stayed at home, and didn't go far.

Helped the children with their lessons online.

Cleared out some cupboards, and it all went fine.

And I grieved for those who died.

What did you do in Lockdown, Grandad?

I worked at home, which wasn't too bad.

Spent time weeding and planting in the garden.

Mended tools and waited for the glue to harden.

And I grieved for those who died.

– Margaret Langsford

ART EXHIBITION AT 35 OCK STREET

Rob Elliott

Every six weeks or so the Café at 35 Ock Street hosts an exhibition of art / photography. If you visit between now and Christmas, you can see art and read poetry drawn, painted and written in a wide variety of media by Rob Elliott.



Rob returned to Abingdon due to Covid, having previously been involved in Christchurch, Bayworth Baptist Chapel and the CiA in a number of ways between 1994 and 2004.

Rob says of the exhibition: 'This is my second exhibition in Abingdon. The first was about 30 years and 3 months ago, when as part of the BTEC 1st Diploma in Art class at Abingdon College we did an end of year show in the beautiful Abingdon Museum. All the best people take about 30 years to 'mature'!

As well as Abingdon, the art was created in Oxfordshire towns, rural places in Gloucestershire, a few cities – east Oxford; east and north London; east, west and north Bristol – and other places between: places I've lived and worked, been part of communities and part of church, and often done youth, community, church and charity work since being sent out to Hackney 17 years ago.



The last 30 years have included many twists and turns, including venturing through a few periods of depression, self harm, addiction, family traumas, identity crisis and figuring out, church rifts, wrestling with angels, wonderful meetings with God and amazing people, experiencing UK inequality right in my face and figuring on what to do, as well as climate change / angst / action, and hope. And, perhaps most importantly, accepting the imperfect and learning to accept love. I'm still working on it.

It's been inspired by the love of parents, sisters, friends, colleagues, Christian brothers and sisters, as well as brave and beautiful campaigners from the Speak Network, the Craftivist Collective, the Greenbelt festival, the Preston New Road anti-frack family, campaigners against the arms trade, and supporters of Water Aid, to name a few. As well as Ghandi, Martin Luther King Jr., Louise Donkin and Jesus Christ.

It is my hope that the art may give talking points to the extrovert and company to the introvert, and stir some to art, action or articulation ... and to give hugs.'

The exhibition is open 10:30am to 2pm Monday to Friday, and 10:30am to 12:30pm Saturday.

If you would like to contact Rob, please feel free at: brother_robort@hotmail.com.



THE GOOD PLACE: TV REVIEW

Benjamin Showan



A young woman, recently deceased, wakes up in the Good Place. This appears as a kind of high-tech holiday village, sparkingly clean, populated by a racially and gender-diverse selection of smiling, lovely people under the benign, slightly vague management of a man called Michael (played by Ted Danson, in his funniest role since *Cheers*). Eleanor has made it to the Good Place because of her exemplary moral, self-sacrificing lifestyle back on Earth, and everyone she meets appears to be equally deserving of this eternal reward.

This is the set-up of the Netflix series *The Good Place* and the only problem, as Eleanor knows full well, is that she doesn't belong. In her life she was a moral sewer, and knew it, and didn't care. For her, the Good Place is the wrong place.

And that is just the beginning. Cracks begin to show in the stories of the other residents of the Good Place and, just as the joke is starting to wear thin, the finale of the first series gives us a twist that redefines everything.

Let me say straight out that *The Good Place* is not a Christian show, in that it makes no reference to anyone or anything like Jesus or the Christian God. Even so, over four series and 50 episodes, we instead get a lot of quite serious thought, wrapped up in some very funny writing, about how a works-based reward system in the afterlife *ought* to function – and how absurd it would be. We meet the most righteous man on Earth, who lives his life walking on eggshells, a compliant doormat for everyone, in case he violates some rule he doesn't know about. We learn that in between the Good and Bad Places lies the Medium Place, population 1: a deceased corporate lawyer and coke addict whose fortune was used to found a charity. You just want to thank God for Grace!

Other strengths of *The Good Place*: it does show that even the worst people have the capacity to change (they may not choose to use it, but it's there); the humour is clean and never unkind, helped by the fact that it is physically impossible to swear in the Good Place; and if you remember *Cheers* with fondness, Ted Danson gets to show his Sam Malone persona again – smarmy, trying very hard to be sincere and never quite as on top of the game as he thinks he is. It's very logical, slightly science fictional and extremely thought-provoking.

Or you can just watch it for the laughs.

CALLED TO FORGIVE: THE CHARLESTON CHURCH SHOOTING, A VICTIM'S HUSBAND AND THE PATH TO HEALING AND PEACE

**Anthony B. Thompson (Bethany House,
ISBN 978-0764232985)**

**Reviewed by Ben Jeapes (Christ Church
on Long Furlong)**

On 17th June 2015, a study group met in the basement of Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal church, Charleston, South Carolina, to study the Parable of the Sower. The study was led by Myra Thompson, her first since being licensed as a minister, and she had put a great deal of effort into preparing it.

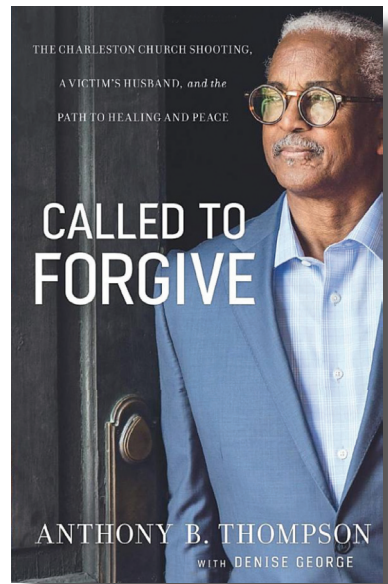
Unexpectedly, a young white man joined the study, slipping in just as it was beginning. He was welcomed with joy, and sat politely and listened for an hour without joining in. As the study concluded and the group rose to stand and pray, he pulled out a gun and opened fire. Nine people died, including Myra. The gunman, 21-year-old Dylann Roof, calmly walked out. He was tracked down and arrested the next day.

He later admitted that he almost hadn't gone through with it, because the people there had been so nice to him.

Myra's husband, the Rev. Anthony Thompson, pastor of another Charlestown church, is the author of this book.

Thompson was present at Roof's parole hearing (bail, understandably, was denied). He was given the chance to speak, and even though he had formerly resolved to stay quiet, he knew that he had to stand up and, publicly and explicitly, tell Roof that he forgave him.

How could he not? Thompson knew that the Bible is quite clear on this. There is no hint of forgiveness being an option. The sinless Son of God was nailed to a cross and forgave his killers; sinful humans, forgiven by that same Son of God, simply do not get the choice.



Thompson punctures several wrong ideas about forgiveness. It is not – it is far from – patting someone on the head and saying it doesn’t matter. It does not have to be acknowledged or reciprocated (Roof has yet to show the slightest sign of repentance). It does not involve forgetting the offence – how could Thompson ever forget what Roof did? There is no such thing as ‘forgive and forget’. But then, God never says he will forget our sin either. He says instead that he will *not remember* (Hebrews 8.12). The difference is subtle, but important.

And forgiveness heals. After the shootings, Charlestown was on tenterhooks and the National Guard were on standby, anticipating all the usual riot and disorder that tends to follow race-based gun crimes in the US.

It never happened. Roof – who was sentenced to death and is currently on Death Row – had hoped to incite a race war between blacks and whites, which in his twisted mind white would inevitably win. He deliberately chose Charlestown as the venue for his act as the city’s history is so interwoven with that of slavery – most Africans brought to North America in chains would have been landed and sold there. Instead, as a direct result of Thompson’s forgiveness, miracles happened. There were no riots. Events were set in motion that led to the Confederate flag finally being taken down from public buildings; to the city of Charlestown passing a resolution to ‘Recognize, Denounce and Apologize for the City’s Involvement with Slavery’ (the full text of this is included in an appendix); to thousands of blacks and whites joining hands in a human chain stretching across the city in an act of love and reconciliation. Stories of harmony and brotherhood appeared in newspapers and social media all around the planet, and hardened, cynical editors were forced to admit that this all came from Thompson’s Gospel-based decision to forgive.

Bible study guides are provided based on each chapter of the book, and another appendix contains Myra’s notes for the Bible study that she led immediately prior to the shooting.

I can safely say this has been one of the most challenging, but rewarding, Christian books I have ever read.

ANSWERS TO LOCKDOWN LOGIC PUZZLE, PAGE 16			
45	Marcia	Methodist	Wrote a novel
40	Matthew	Baptist	Guitar
35	Lucas	Anglican	Scottish dancing
30	Joanna	Catholic	Cooking
AGE	FRIEND	CHURCH	HOBBY

SUNDAY CHURCH SERVICES IN ABINGDON

All information is as correct as we can make it, but you are advised to check with the churches themselves.

Abingdon Baptist Church

Ock Street, 10.30am and livestream.
www.abingdonbaptist.org.uk/

Abingdon Community Church

Thameside School, Cotman Close,
10.30am.
[www.facebook.com/groups/
AbingdonCC/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/AbingdonCC/)

Abingdon Vineyard Church

Preston Road Community Centre,
10.30am.
www.abingdonvineyard.org.uk/

All Saints Methodist Church

Appleford Drive, 10.30am and 6.30pm.
www.allsaintsabingdon.org.uk/

Christ Church

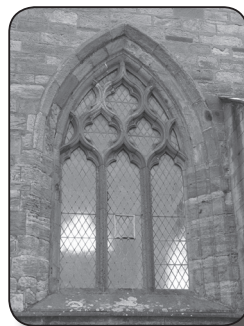
Northcourt Road (Church of England),
8.00am, 9.30am, 11.15am and
6.30pm.
cca.uk.net/

Christ Church on Long Furlong

Long Furlong Primary School, Boulter
Drive (Church of England), 10.30am
Also on Zoom.
www.longfurlongchurch.org.uk/

Our Lady & St Edmund of Abingdon

Radley Road (Roman Catholic),
8.45am, 10.15 am and 6.30 pm.
www.ourladyandstedmund.org.uk



Peachcroft Christian Centre

Lindsay Drive, 10am.
www.peachcroftcc.org/

Religious Society of Friends

Abbey Centre, Audlett Drive, 10.15am.
www.quaker.org.uk/meetings/abingdon

St Helen's Church

West St Helen Street (Church of
England), 8am (alternating monthly
with St Nicolas), 10.30am and 5.30pm.
www.abingdon-st-helens.org.uk/

St Michael & All Angels Church

Park Road (Church of England),
9.30am.
www.stmichaels-abingdon.org.uk/

St Nicolas Church

Market Place (Church of England),
8am (alternating monthly with St
Helen's), 11.15am.
www.stnicolasabingdon.org.uk/

The Salvation Army

West St Helen Street, 10.30am.
www.salvationarmy.org.uk/abingdon

Trinity Church

Conduit Road (Methodist and United
Reformed), 10.30am and 6.30pm.
trinityabingdon.org.uk/wordpress/

LOCKDOWN LOGIC PUZZLE

Four friends from different churches took advantage of being furloughed to take up new hobbies. From the clues, work out their ages, their new hobby, and the church each one goes to. Answers on page 14.



FRIEND				CHURCH				HOBBY			
Matthew	Marcia	Lucas	Joanna	Baptist	Roman Catholic	Anglican	Methodist	Cooking	Guitar	Wrote a novel	Scottish dancing
					</						



1. The one who took up Scottish dancing is older than the Catholic.
2. Matthew is not an Anglican.
3. Joanna is 30.
4. The 40-year-old is a Baptist. Matthew is not the oldest.
5. Marcia did not take up cooking.
6. The one who took up Scottish dancing is 35.
7. The Anglican did not write a novel.
8. The one who took up Scottish dancing is younger than Marcia.
9. Of the ones who took up Scottish dancing and learned guitar, one is 35 and the other is a Baptist.
10. Joanna took up either cooking or guitar.

AGE	FRIEND	CHURCH	HOBBY
30			
35			
40			
45			