

SPRING 2026

# VCF News!



## February was the month for in-person fellowship & fun at the VCF weekends!

### **Welcome to our VCF spring newsletter!**

As we step into a fresh new season, we're thankful for the ways God continues to shape and encourage us. This time of year reminds us of new life and renewed hope — truths we see beautifully reflected in both creation and in God's word.

As Easter passes, we continue to celebrate Jesus Christ, our risen Lord, whose compassion guides us and whose love anchors all we do. May this newsletter bring you encouragement, stories of fellowship, and reminders of God's faithfulness in every part of our callings.

*The VCF committee*

February was a busy month with back-to-back Northern and Southern weekends. Meeting face-to-face was definitely the highlight of our year!

**Anita Bates** shared her experience - 'After years of VCF membership, I finally attended the northern weekend—and it didn't disappoint! The venue offered stunning Lake District views, and the food was like school dinner, which I loved! The programme was excellent and thought-provoking as we explored what makes us human with breakout rooms for discussion. It was inspiring to see Christianity thriving in our industry. I felt encouraged that God has me where He needs me. We also enjoyed a walk and



a Ceilidh. It was great to put faces to names...I will be returning!

### Dates for your diary!

Scottish weekend,  
Cairngorms,  
2-4 Oct. 2026

All fellowship  
weekend & yearly  
members VCF  
update. Quinta  
19-21 Feb 2027

Southern  
weekend,  
St Cassian's,  
11-13 Feb 2028

Northern weekend  
and yearly VCF  
members update.  
Blencathra,  
10-12 Mar 2028



## Memories from the VCF weekends:

During the Northern weekend, several vet students joined us and brought great enthusiasm to all our activities. They updated us on the VCF work at their respective universities. What a blessing it is to have them among us!

**Sarah Halliday**, who attends Nottingham vet school, shared her experience: 'I had a fantastic time at the Northern weekend! I found the teaching very encouraging and appreciated the fellowship with others. As a student, it was also helpful to spend time with vets who are living out their faith in their daily work. We spent time praying for our vet schools and for each other, which I especially valued.'

One of the highlights was walking in the beautiful surroundings, a welcome chance to clear the mind by putting our studies aside for a couple of days.'



**John 'Knight'** stepped in to replace a missing chess piece at St Cassian's

**Kerry Williams**, VCF president, said, 'This year's Southern weekend was again a huge encouragement, just as I had hoped. I came away with my perspective refreshed and a renewed desire to live out my faith in my day-to-day work.'

Ben's talks were excellent - really clear, with so much real-life application. The small-group discussions allowed us to explore more deeply what the Bible passages meant for our lives, and pray for each other.



**Kerry and Alice Hall** share a warm hug!

So many of the highlights are the times in between the planned sessions - the conversations over coffee, the chats at mealtimes, deepening friendships and making new ones.

Saturday evening saw the hall crammed with bean bags as various groups of people played games, chatted, and just relaxed together in front of a log fire. Of course, there was the now-obligatory game of 'sardines', with several students displaying excellent hiding skills.

We were reminded on the Sunday of Hebrews 10:25 - "not giving up meeting together... but encouraging one another." This means that we need to put the 2027 VCF weekend into our diaries now!

## Southern weekend: by Gideon Smit

'It was a great joy to have **Ben Leney** speak at the VCF Southern Weekend this year. Ben spoke on the theme "Are you firm in the faith?," drawing on the lives of three Judean kings—Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Josiah—to explore how faith is tested, lost, and restored. Through their stories, we are reminded that God is faithful, is merciful, and still speaks to us today.

Hezekiah's account (2 Kings 19) shows what it looks like to stand firm under pressure. Facing the overwhelming threat of the Assyrian army, he resisted panic and instead turned straight to God, laying the situation before Him in prayer. His response was marked by humility, honesty, and a desire for God's glory above all else. In moments of crisis, he models a faith that depends entirely on God rather than human solutions. As we are encouraged in "Stay alert, stand firm in the faith, show courage, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love" (1 Corinthians 16:13-14), Hezekiah's life brings these words into reality.

In contrast, Manasseh's reign reveals how far a person can drift from God. His leadership led Judah into deep idolatry and sin. Yet even here, God's mercy is evident. When Manasseh humbled himself in captivity and cried out to the Lord, he was heard and restored. His story is a powerful reminder that no one is beyond the reach of God's grace.

Josiah, Manasseh's grandson, demonstrates the impact of a heart responsive to God's Word. When the Book of the Law was rediscovered, Josiah acted with humility and urgency, leading widespread reform and renewal.

By examining the lives of Manasseh, Hezekiah, and Josiah, we can learn the importance of obedience, repentance, and faithfulness. Their stories demonstrate the consequences of turning away from God and highlight the hope of redemption through sincere repentance and God's grace. From their experiences, believers are encouraged to trust God, remain committed to His ways, and seek His forgiveness when they stray. Together, the lives of these three kings remind us that faith can falter but can also be rebuilt. Whether we feel strong or struggling, God invites us to return to Him, to listen, and to stand firm with courage and love.'



## Northern weekend speaker reflections: by Tim Proudlove

'We looked at 'What does it mean to be human?' recognising that veterinary work is about human-animal engagement, so it was worth spending time looking at one side of that engagement. We considered our creatureliness, acknowledging that it is good to be finite — we are designed that way — and therefore it is good to have limits. We focussed on how we are created in the image of God, and that because of that, we have a task to fulfill, representing the good, generous, wise Creator of the universe in the particularities of our individual circumstances. And we considered our being made male and female, seeing our maleness and our femaleness as callings to us from God for us to live into by his grace. We finished by reminding ourselves of the deep goodness of being human, but at the same time acknowledging the deep sadness of being human in our world today. We live with longing and hope for the renewal into rich full authentic human existence that is promised one day to those who trust in Jesus Christ.





## Charlotte Hamilton, the BoatVet: A Journey of Faith, Compassion, and Animal Care

'I feel incredibly blessed to have been brought up in a Christian family, and my faith has always been the foundation of my life. I was baptised in 2012 at Woodlands Church in Bristol, where I also trained as a vet. Alongside this, I have long felt a calling towards charity work, outreach, and campaigning for positive change in animal welfare—something that ultimately led me into this profession.

When I met Lloyd, one of our very first conversations centred around what we hoped to do with our lives. We quickly discovered a shared dream: to travel the world and provide free veterinary care to animals in need. Now, as a married couple with a shared passion for humanitarian work and a love of sailing and living close to nature, we have been working towards this vision ever since. Six years later, as the Boat Vet team, we are just weeks away from setting sail on this exciting and challenging mission.

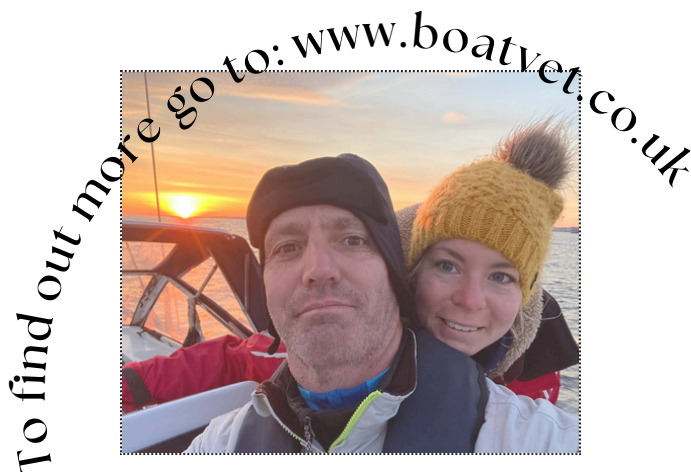


Through BoatVet, we hope to deliver free veterinary care wherever it is needed most—whether that's providing rabies vaccinations, parasite treatments, neutering services, or treating illness and injury in remote communities. Equipped with essential supplies, we aim to bring vital care to hard-to-reach places.

We have already made significant progress: our boat has been purchased, major renovation work is nearly complete, and we are building partnerships with veterinary organisations and charities. We plan to launch in the spring of 2026, heading towards the Mediterranean shortly after, learning and adapting as we go.

Alongside clinical work, we are passionate about community engagement—raising awareness, supporting local organisations, and sharing stories that highlight both need and hope. In time, we hope to expand our services and continue growing this mission.

As we take these next steps, we would greatly appreciate your prayers for God's guidance, provision, and presence as we begin this journey.'



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# Childhood reflections of an Armenian Easter - by Lévon Stephan

Easter is a major feast of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the key celebration of the liturgical year. It is preceded by a 40-day fast known as "The Great Lent," which focuses on repentance, prayer, and abstaining from all animal products. As children, we also observed this by not watching television or attending parties, but the worst was that we had no milk with cornflakes, no butter on bread, and no chocolate! Instead, we attended church twice a week and on Sundays. It was a way of life I grew used to, and I was probably physically the healthiest then.

The Great Lent feast concludes on the Friday before Palm Sunday, when the priest blesses willow branches and palm leaves. Waving palms symbolise the people of Jerusalem raising their hands to heaven in welcoming Christ's entry into Jerusalem on a donkey. This marks the beginning of Holy Week, which in the Armenian church continues with services at least twice daily, every day that week.

Most notably, **Maundy Thursday** commemorates the Last Supper Jesus shared with his disciples and forms the foundation of the Eucharist. This 3-hour service usually starts at 11 am. After a quick lunch, there is the "Washing of the Feet" ceremony. Parishioners push their reluctant young children forward for the bishop to wash their feet, symbolising humility and service. Parents and grandparents watch with pride as their loved ones are blessed in this way.

As a child, my mother insisted we wash our feet at home before church to avoid disgrace if we presented smelly feet to the bishop. Only the left foot is washed, dried, and marked with butter as anointing oil. Now, as an adult, I still volunteer for this service, as I consider it a great honour.

This very long service involves chants, incense, and watching toddlers with candles waiting to have their feet washed—miraculously, no one gets burned! Maundy Thursday ends with the midnight "Service of Darkness," recalling Christ's agony, betrayal, and arrest. As the name suggests, this ceremony takes place in darkness, lit only by a few candles held by the clergy as they read Bible verses.

The candles are extinguished one by one as the service progresses, until the last one is blown out, plunging the church into darkness, and the few remaining congregants depart in silence.

Children do not attend this service, and I will never forget the first time I attended; I was very frightened. The dark ambience of chants sung in a minor key made it profoundly solemn and eerie, all depicting Christ's final betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane by a single kiss – an act usually associated with love, not certain death. We then quietly go home and straight to bed, as it's after midnight – just as the disciples slept, whilst Christ was arrested and tried.

**Good Friday** is the most solemn day of the Christian calendar. A midday Crucifixion service focuses on Christ's suffering, death, and burial. A wooden coffin is placed at the foot of the altar, covered in white linen cloth. The congregation enter and lays fresh-cut flowers on the coffin, covering it in beautiful colours. Unbeknownst to many, the coffin is lined with lead! Six strong male volunteer pallbearers lift the coffin during the ceremony, carry it through the church, then out into the church grounds, followed by the congregation. Having been a pallbearer myself, I know it is no easy task—the coffin is incredibly heavy and felt heavier as the service went on. (Continued)

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## Childhood reflections of an Armenian Easter (continued)

As a young man, I was told that the weight of the coffin represented our own sin that Jesus took upon himself, and hence was laid out in that coffin. No wonder it was always so heavy for me; but ironically, it grew lighter as I grew older—when, in fact, it should have become impossible to lift! The service concludes with the coffin lifted high above our heads forming an arch at the entrance, and the congregation pass single file underneath it to re-enter the church.

Afterwards, only the linen cloth with the flowers is brought back inside, without the coffin. The service ends, and the flowers are distributed to the congregation, who then give them to family, friends, the elderly, and the infirm who could not attend.

**Easter Saturday** evening marks the service of the Resurrection Vigil – the period of waiting between Jesus’s death and resurrection. In Armenian tradition, it is not merely quiet mourning but also carries a strong sense of expectation and hidden victory. During this service, chapter 6 of the book of Daniel is read, a passage deeply symbolic of deliverance, resurrection, and victory over death. This particular passage describes how Daniel, who was innocent, was condemned to be thrown into a lion’s den for certain death. However, in a moment of apparent defeat, he emerges alive the next day – an unexpected salvation. This is seen as a foreshadowing of Christ’s innocent condemnation to death when placed in the tomb and His triumphant rise from death. The service helps believers understand Easter as the fulfilment of earlier divine “patterns”.

So we arrive at **Easter Sunday** – the highest and most celebrated Christian festival. Although the service lasts over four hours, everyone visits the church that day, greeting friends old and new, popping in and out throughout the service, and exchanging the greeting “Christ is risen from the dead” with the response “Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ.” As a child, I remember people hanging around outside, chatting, with men smoking cigarettes and drinking dark, strong Armenian coffee brewed for them, even as the service continued. Everyone is welcome and receives holy Communion that day, and the giving of

this holy sacrament, tintured with wine, seems to take ages as it is offered individually, one by one. The service is very elaborate, with bells, candles, many hymns, and incense – I used to think it was a great celebratory party.

The Easter service is followed by a delicious food bazaar – featuring roast lamb and flatbread. One tradition is giving red-coloured boiled eggs to both adults and children. They are dyed with red onion skins, with the colour symbolising the blood of Christ sealed within the ‘tomb’ of the egg’s shell. A common family tradition on Easter Sunday is the egg-tapping game, where participants knock one egg against another to break the shell - a reminder of the resurrection from the sealed tomb. As a child, I didn’t like boiled eggs, so I simply played the game – but like children all over the world – we looked forward to the distribution of the delicious chocolate eggs, which inevitably followed – as will our own salvation for all who believe.

But it is not all over just yet ...on **Easter Monday**, it is our day of remembrance when we visit the graves of our dearly departed family and friends. A priest is always quietly moving around in the Armenian graveyard on this day – ready to bless the grave and the souls of those we wish to remember. Again, as a child, the image that sticks with me is the surreptitious exchange of coins that passes to the priest in order to conduct this act of service. And so these traditions continue, until...

John 14:3 !!

*Lévon Stephan*

Lévon is an  
ordained deacon  
whose family has  
maintained  
Armenian traditions  
in the UK for  
generations



**(If you'd like to share a story or see a subject featured in the VCF Newsletter, please contact [admin@vcf.org.uk](mailto:admin@vcf.org.uk).)**

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# When a Season of New Life Meets Hard Realities

## Vikki Wyse - Farm Vet

It's spring, and the rain has finally stopped. As you drive to work, lambs are out in the fields, and calves are dozing in the grass. You might even spot a foal here and there. This is the season that my Small Animal veterinary friends often say they envy – the time I get to enjoy this season of new life and sunshine every year. As a farm vet, it's easy to see the Good Shepherd analogy – *Isaiah 40:11 reminds us that "He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs, close to his heart."* During good times and favourable weather, the blessings and security God gives us are plentiful.



But what we often overlook as ambulatory vets is that it's not the medicine, emergencies at night, or the grumpy mother cows that exhaust us. I can accept euthanasia because the sheep just isn't worth the cost of a caesarean; I can deal with the loss of a calf that was presented backwards and no one realised until a tail poked out.... It's the farmers who aren't making any money, and don't know how they'll even feed their livestock this year that is heartbreaking. The mental health crisis in farming is sadly as deep and as broad as it is in veterinary medicine. In these moments, what is most striking is how Jesus interacted with people. He observed and met them exactly where they were—demanding, stressed, disappointed, confused, desperate.

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He wasn't annoyed by them; He didn't try to avoid their questions. Sometimes it's hard to remember that each of those individuals is someone Christ loves.

Galatians 6:9 says, "Let us not grow weary of doing good." We can become physically tired and mentally exhausted. But it's important that we don't let that harden us in doing good to people. We can choose, by God's grace, to be compassionate even when we really don't feel like it. He can make us patient, kind, and loving, in His strength rather than our own. 1 Corinthians 7:17 says, "nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God called them."

So, rather than avoiding that difficult client, that awkward phone call, or that messy situation – we are called to meet His people exactly as God presents them to us. And treating them gently may be exactly what they're not expecting. Who knows what conversations will start?

*Please pray for our farm vets and farmers:*

*Dear Lord,*

*We lift up to You the farmers and vets in our country, especially those who are exhausted, anxious, and struggling. You see the long hours, the isolation and loneliness, the financial pressures, and the burdens they carry. Lord, draw near to them in their struggles and remind them that they are not alone and that you have a plan for their lives, as promised in Jeremiah 29:11.*

*Bring Your peace to anxious minds, Your strength into tired bodies, and Your hope into hearts that feel overwhelmed. We pray that the right people are placed around them for support and encouragement. Help them to know Your presence in every moment of each day.*

*In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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Reserve your place on the VCF Scotland Weekend  
in the stunning Cairngorms now!  
2-4 October 2026



This QR code will direct you to  
the registration page on the  
VCF website

Or use this link - <https://www.vcf.org.uk/whats-on/vcf-weekends/>

Looking forward to seeing you in October!

### Behind the scenes with the VCF:

- The Committee met in early January to plan for the upcoming year and finalise the Northern and Southern weekend arrangements. They met again in March to evaluate the success of those weekends.
- The Annual Members Meeting was held during the Northern weekend
- Robert (treasurer) and Bonny (administrator), along with the Trustees, submitted the annual VCF 2025 financial report to the Charity Commission
- Blencathra FSC and St Cassian's were reserved for the 2028 Northern and Southern weekends
- Plans are being finalised for the Scotland weekend in October, and the booking page on the website is now live!
- Committee members and Trustees held virtual meetings to discuss succession planning to secure the VCF's future



Early in the year,  
Ann O'Flynn caught up with Cambridge  
University vet students for a pint, and  
Fiona Lovatt met up with Northeast  
members for lunch, a walk and prayers  
together!

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