

# Joyce Hopkins

When sue asked me to say a few words on behalf of Joyce's church family, my first reaction was, "Yes, of course, it would be a privilege".

My second was, 'Help!'

But I sent an email to all the church family, asking for their anecdotes and memories – and the replies came flooding in!

I'll read them to you. There's no priority, they're simply in the order I received them...

**Cheree** wrote: "Joyce was very scary when I was in Girls' Brigade! But, in later years, she was always thanking me for the service and asking after my mum when she was away from church. A true saint of our days."

**Colin Speed**, our previous minister, said he remembers Joyce painting the gents' toilet blue – because she had some paint left over.

And she thought the outside of the church, in Waterloo Road, looked shabby so she painted it a bright colour – but only as far as she could reach!

He says she was a great worker in the church and a very supportive Deacon.

**Tricia writes:** "What can I say? She was just always there and always working either cleaning, or attending to flowers. Always reliable, always constant, always with a word of encouragement or thanks."

**Terry Rees** sent this: Joyce was a Canterbury City Councillor in Harbour Ward for some years. Then, when I and Julia Seath were elected, Joyce lost her seat. After the results were announced, Joyce and I had a short conversation – *when I read that, I thought yes, a bit like Trump and Clinton – but not according to Terry, he says,*

– it was a warm and friendly conversation and, although I vaguely knew Joyce from when I visited Middle Wall to preach, I think it was from that moment on that we became friends.

Joyce and I often spoke on Sundays thereafter. Joyce had a strong sense of servanthood, whether in public office or church work.

**Sue Ashcroft** said: "Joyce would help me with my flowers for the church but we were always talking about our motor bikes."

**Helen Fuller** says: “Joyce was such a loving and giving person. I will always remember her teaching us flower arranging at Girls Brigade, a brilliant skill to learn and whenever I’m lucky enough now to be sent flowers, I always have in my head what Joyce taught us about how to arrange them. Such a lovely and wonderful person who will be greatly, greatly missed.”

**June Bennett** writes: “Joyce was always the first to arrive to our Bible Study Group – on her bike. Always very cheerful. On one occasion, she fell while going out of my front door but soon got up saying she was OK – only to find next day that she had actually broken her hip. I felt awful but Joyce, her usual self, thinking only of others, simply asked if I would look after her bike for her.”

**Jane Sadler** told me she remembered Joyce wheeling her lawn mower down the street all the way from her house to the church, here, to cut the grass, and then pushing it all the way home again!

**Jim Parker** said this about Joyce: “Joyce was a ‘character’ - a ‘one off’, who is going to be greatly missed for her floral talents and devotion to Middle Wall. Whenever I called in at the church, during the week, there was a good chance of seeing that familiar bike outside and a voice hailing you from somewhere on the premises. The tasks she willingly carried out week by week in the church have now been partly taken over by other individuals. I was for a time the bandmaster for the Brigade Band. The Girls Brigade were very protective of their young ladies, and Joyce agreed to come down on a Monday night and chaperone the girls in the band. She willingly joined in, and learnt to play a bugle, which she did ‘with gusto’ and great enjoyment. We have just said goodbye to a very humble and hardworking servant of our Lord, and there can’t be many busy town councillors who would spend their Saturdays cleaning the church halls and toilets!”

**Sarah Robinson** sent this: “My two enduring memories of Joyce will be of her giving me my first lesson in flower arranging. Maybe she could tell I had no skill as this first lesson was also my last! And of her finding a pot of bright orange paint in a cupboard in the church and deciding to paint the walls of the outdoor loo in that colour to try and entice people to use it more often. I seem to remember that Colin Speed was quite nonplussed by that idea.”

**Margaret Hunnisett:** is disappointed that she can't be here today but she says: "I met Joyce about 66 years ago when in Girls Life Brigade here at the church. Joyce was about 5 or 6 years older than me so she was a Senior and I, a mere Junior.

I was terrified of the older girls, especially when at Camp, and I remember them getting into hot water out 'chasing' after boys! We thought they were quite wicked!

Later Joyce joined our Church and I was privileged to serve on the Diaconate with her for several years.

I think in almost every Christmas card I received from Joyce she wrote "thank you, to you and Jack for all you do for the Church" which made me feel quite humble, for what we did was nothing compared to what Joyce did.

She was always there with Girls Brigade, Deacon duties, flower arranging, cleaning, etc, etc. How we shall all miss her happy smiling face and warm welcome and I truly thank God for the privilege of knowing this lovely Christian lady."

**Jean Rothery** says "I was inspired by her role model as a leader in the church. Her deference to every minister she served under; her willingness to take on responsibility to lead.

She never considered herself to be spiritually superior, but was truly a servant. She took on every task from mopping floors to leading prayers. Always concerned not to waste the church's money (eeking out flowers week by week for example). On the other hand, not afraid to voice an opinion! It was 'her' church, after all.

Then there was the year Joyce decided to have a 'harvest of the sea' display for harvest festival, and the stench!

I also remember her numerous spider plants, and the everlasting pampas grass!"

**Grace Stirling:** says "I always admired Joyce's complete devotion to the Lord and to our church. She always encouraged me in my faith and in every Christmas card she would thank me for what I did.

I felt I could talk to Joyce about anything and she would always have a kind word of understanding and encouragement."

**Kath Rowden** gave me a note, saying: "Joyce would always cross from one side of the church to the other to talk to me. I remember how she would be at the church before 8 o'clock on Easter Sunday morning, giving out texts to everybody as they arrived. (*That was when we used to have an early morning communion service on Easter Day*) Whatever needed doing here at the church, Joyce would be there to do it.

Joyce was a good friend – heaven's gain and our loss!"

This last one from **Lucy Gambrill**:

“Joyce and I were close friends for over 50 years. In the 1970s she let us use her beach hut for the summer.

We were baptised and became Officers in the Girls Brigade within a few months of each other.

On the day of my baptism Joyce took me for an early morning drive as she knew I was anxious as I was afraid of deep water. Driving along Marine Parade she commented on how calm the sea was. Then, realising she had intended to divert my attention from water, she quickly turned inland.

We shared many years in Brigade together and at one time had over 80 girls. We had to meet two nights a week to fit everyone in. Joyce preferred to work with the older girls but found the teenagers challenging!

We served as Deacons together and, more recently, Joyce and I led a small Bible Study Group and she always gave positive and helpful comments.

Lately, it was hard to visit Joyce at home and see her declining health but, the last time we were together, we held hands and prayed. She was a good friend and will be missed but I rest in the knowledge that she is now with her Lord whom she served so well for so many years.”

---

Thank you to all those people who responded to my request for help. I was initially surprised at the numbers, then I realised that this was Joyce.

Just a few days ago I was involved in another funeral, that of May Gilder. And in that service I read a poem entitled ‘This life mattered’. Towards the end, it contained these words...

What matters are the memories  
that live on in those who loved us.  
What matters is how long we  
will be remembered,  
by whom and for what.

Joyce has given us all a great many memories.

Her life mattered.

**Me:** for my own part, I remember how she sat with me at a Girls' Brigade coffee morning when I was still very new here, and she told me how she and Hoppy had met. I was surprised that she shared such personal thoughts with me – almost a stranger.

I remember, like others have said, how she was always doing the church flowers, rearranging them to get an extra week out of them, watering them – there was often a damp patch on the carpet just there!

Joyce was very much a part of this church: she served on the diaconate for more than 30 years, was a Girls' Brigade officer for more than 40 years, and she was a member here for more than 50 years – when Joyce joined things, she was really committed to them!

And that's apart from her years as a local councillor – and all this while holding down a full-time job as a florist – and bringing up a family!

Joyce had a heart of gold but, sometimes, a simple view of life – that's not meant to be a criticism!

I remember the occasion when the Health and Hygiene Inspectors made an unannounced visit and found something not quite right in our kitchen – not enough paper towels, or some other minor infringement – and they marked us down. Joyce was quite indignant and said, "Well, if they had told us they were coming, we would have made sure!"

Let me end with a very personal story: 25 years ago I was in the middle a dark period of my life; my father had just died; I was going through a divorce; my children were going to live with their mother; and my house was up for sale. Christmas was just a few days away and I had nowhere to live.

On the Sunday before that Christmas, Joyce, knowing my situation, asked me where I was going to live. I told her that, at that moment, I had no idea.

Later that afternoon, Joyce rang me and said, “I’ve been thinking about you and I’ve found somewhere for you to live. Sue doesn’t like sleeping on her own so you can move in there!”

What Joyce actually meant was that Sue had moved out of her nice little house in Chestfield because she didn’t like sleeping in that house on her own and had moved back home to live with her Mum, Joyce. That house was now empty and Sue let me live there for a few weeks (on my own) – rent free!

We’ve been friends ever since and Sue and I did laugh about it later but, really, that to me was Joyce – she cared about people and she just wanted to help wherever she could, in whatever way she could and I, for one, will always treasure my memories of Joyce.

And I am sure that you will all treasure your memories of Joyce too.

Thank you.