

# Individuals who work selflessly for others

## The Rt Revd Nicholas McKinnel

High Sheriff of Devon 2023-24

Amid the visits, civic engagements, church services and enjoyable social events of the last months, what remains first and foremost with me are the meetings and conversations with numerous individuals.

I think of the police sergeant driving me round a busy city centre on a Friday night relishing his job, pointing out known troublemakers and expressing his passion that clubbers should feel safe enjoying their night out.

Or there's the ex-offender proudly showing me around the vegetable patch he is tending as part of a well-established project enabling him and others to grow in personal confidence, learn new skills and find employment – often for the first time in their lives.

A prison governor introduced a 'Celebrating Success' day by thanking the thirty or so prisoners receiving awards for their help in ensuring the smooth running of the prison, offering congratulations for achievements as varied as reducing a methadone dosage, bricklaying qualifications and caring for a terminally ill inmate.

A magistrate spoke frankly of the dilemmas she faces in the Family Court when deciding the future of a small child from a troubled home, weighing up family ties against the child's safety, sometimes in the face of conflicting advice and emotions.

A civic leader told me of the strains of trying to do a decent job in the midst of social media abuse, ill-informed reporting and hard budgetary choices – tough decisions echoed by a senior police officer in his own field of work.

As we chatted under canvas in pouring rain at a Coronation event, a local community organiser in an old people's village expressed the satisfaction he felt at drawing together those who could otherwise be isolated and lonely. And the executive of a dementia charity who invited me to open a new facility spoke of imaginative ways to awaken memories and bring joy to those living with dementia.

An elderly lady from a Methodist church, delighted to be receiving a BEM from the Lord-Lieutenant, recounted how she had delivered food around her seaside town during COVID, resulting in a lunch club that now thrived with dozens of people



In Plymouth with Tim Kingsbury, Regional Director UK Border Force South, and Rear Admiral Christopher Snow CBE DL

every week. Another recipient had spent a lifetime working with young people through the boxing club he ran, and yet another gives hours each week to propagating and planting trees indigenous to the area.

Then there was the Windrush descendant whose father had won respect through his cricketing skills but who described the loneliness, isolation and prejudice that the family faced in their early years on these shores. Or the visit to a Dartmoor farm hosting youngsters from an inner city London borough whose first encounter this was with rural life, the children talking of how, over the course of a week, their initial fear of livestock and the dark had been transformed into a love of sheep, chickens and mud.

A prisoner's wife described to my wife how their judgemental middle-class attitudes and prejudices had been turned upside down through their experience of prison, while another prisoner on licensed recall complained to me of the injustice he felt at being returned to prison without a judicial process and waiting a year already for a parole hearing.

Then there were the cheerful young men on a Community Payback scheme keen to tell me how drugs were much less harmful than alcohol, and the probation officer who had clearly heard it all before and quietly looked skywards;



With Community Payback and the probation service in Paignton

the police dog handler proudly displaying the skills of his Alsatian; the serious discussions at the Local Criminal Justice Board on reducing offending... and the judge overburdened with demands.

All in their own way wrestle with the complexities of the criminal justice system, balancing the rights of individual and society, victim and offender, retribution and rehabilitation, justice and mercy.

At the Coronation, HRH King Charles was given the sceptre, the 'ensign of kingly power and justice', with the words, 'So execute justice that you forget not mercy'. It is a great privilege to see this being worked out through the endeavours of so many impressive people.