

About...

Keep on shining

...how and why it was written

The Rev Canon Andrew White came to visit St Albans a couple of years ago and I was more than annoyed that I couldn't be there when he spoke at my then church, St Pauls, during the morning service – I was preaching in North Hertfordshire for Christian Aid Week.

I was determined to hear him speak, so I squeezed in another church's afternoon service where he was visiting in between lunch and setting up for my church's evening service...

It was worth it. He is truly a remarkable man and I was so struck by his work, perseverance, love for his congregation and his attitude. One phrase he used particularly stuck with me, he said 'don't take care, take risks' – he is the kind of person who has the right to say that.

I had to leave before the end of the talk – and crucially before the questions, of which I had a couple, and I was really miffed to be honest. My church was only a short walk from the one he was speaking at, and as I walked up the Hatfield road I found myself feeling disappointed and disgruntled that I couldn't stick around for more of his much-needed inspiration. I also felt strangely stirred up.

As I turned the key in my church's door, and stepped into the empty building, I found myself singing out the first verse and chorus of this song – and after the evening service I went home, finished it, and sent it to him as soon as I could record it – though I was very embarrassed to do so. The timing lined up so that it arrived with him on a morning where he had been praying much of the night. I was blown away how God used this whole incident.

This song is my prayer for Andrew White, his congregation, and the wider, persecuted church.

...how, where and when it could be used

This song can have its pronouns changed to be sung congregationally, or can be sung in the first person, and is simple for people to pick up. It also works well played in the background with images of Iraq, or other countries with prayer points for persecuted Christians.

...the dedication

The Rev Canon Andrew White probably doesn't need too much introduction, as programmes such as *The Vicar of Baghdad* have told the remarkable story of his church in Iraq.

His church, and his life, are a challenge and an inspiration to me.

...its place on the journey to where world and worship meet

It is easy for us to forget in the UK that being a Christian doesn't generally mean a comfortable life. Many Christians are persecuted for their faith.

We have much to learn from their lives. And much we should be doing to support them – through prayer, through campaigning, and through giving. They are our family.

In either an individual or corporate context, it's easy to forget how big the church is – how many people are interceding or praising God at any one time – we can become very focussed on our own, narrow context, or on the prominent movements within our church culture. But we are part of a continuous offering of worship offered around the world and through the ages – it's important we remember this, and stand with our brothers and sisters in a more corporate way.