

Pathways

The magazine for the people of the Diocese of Oxford | Summer 2019 | **FREE**



Reaching new communities

growing new congregations

INSIDE: How to grieve | Personal discipleship plans | United we picnic

Hello



Thank you to those of you who wrote in to say what you thought of our new magazine. Among the many encouragements, it was good to hear stories of *Pathways* being passed on to others and even a study group to reflect on the issues it covered.

Time taken to discuss positions we might disagree with, or to explore ideas we haven't considered before is important. We live in an age of sharp and polarised debate. Extremes of left and right offer us their certainties. More and more people live in echo chambers of their own making and blame others for their misfortunes.

Pathways is one of many new approaches that we're taking to help us become the best Church we can be in times such as these. The name is intentional; there's more than one route, but each page is, I hope, rooted in our common calling to become more Christ-like.

In this edition, Graeme Fancourt explores how Christian hospitality can speak deeply to souls starved of connection to others. Over on page 10, Joanna Collicut looks at the latest thinking about how we should grieve. Both pieces gently lead us into the difficult topic of assisted dying, much in the news of late and the subject of our head to head.

We have stories of hope and joy too. Our main article describes how and why we're looking to grow as many as 750 new congregations in this Diocese. We're investing £5m in this area, and your church will be able to bid for funds to support local initiatives. Turn to page 17 to find out more.

With over 1,000 churches, chaplaincies and church schools, telling the story of this Diocese is too big a job for one magazine. Lift the corner of this page for a selection of the latest local stories. All of them and more can be found on our website.

You might even like to tune in to my latest project where I interview Christians I've come to know about their faith, their work and their story. Find My (extraordinary) Family wherever you get your podcasts and also on my blog.

Steven Oxford

Bishop Steven

Bishop Steven's sermons, articles and podcasts can be found at blogs.oxford.anglican.org



The Blessing of the Oils

Ministers from across the Diocese flocked to The Eucharist with the Blessing of Oils and Renewal of Ministerial Commitment at Dorchester Abbey on Maundy Thursday.

The olive oils were blessed before being collected by clergy for anointing the sick and dying, signing with the cross at baptism and use in confirmation services.

A full photo essay of the day can be found here: bit.ly/DorchesterChrim



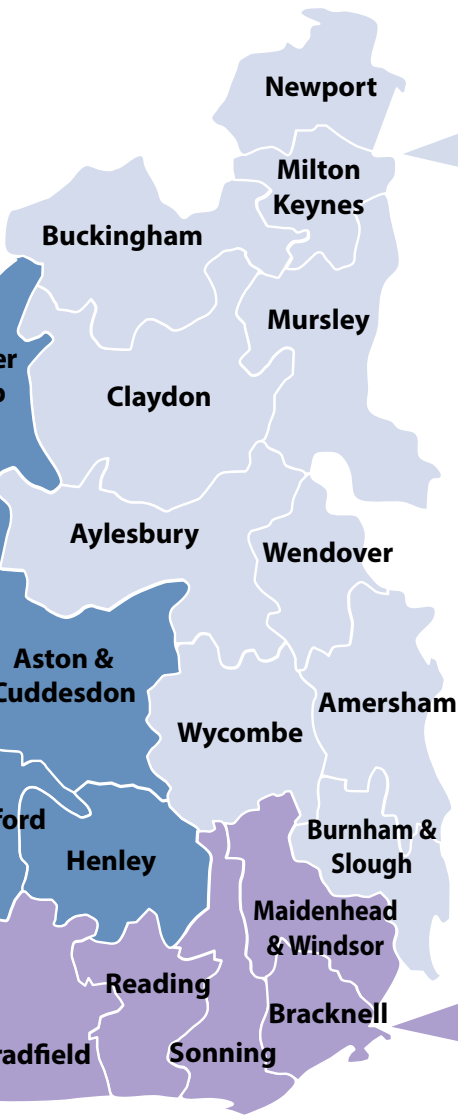
A seven-day church

St Mary and St Nicholas in Littlemore is set to become a seven-day church in one of Oxford's most deprived areas.

The £737,000 Newman Meeting Place scheme will see better heating, a kitchen and toilet installed, and the pews replaced with stackable chairs. A balcony will be built for the organ and musicians, and the vestry converted into a large meeting space.



For longer versions of these stories see oxford.anglican.org



A never-ending food cupboard

Generous villagers are stocking a food cupboard in St Michael's, Steeple Claydon, for anyone in need.

St Michael's is open from 9am to 5pm each day with the cupboard open for people to take food and others to donate non-perishables. There are no rules about who can take food, but a sign asks people not to take more than two-days' supply in one visit.

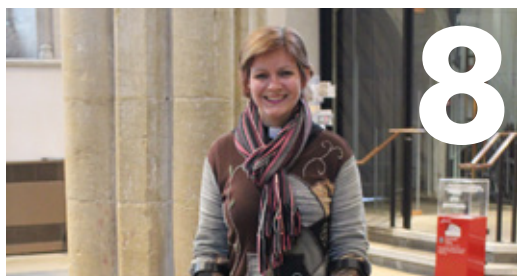


New Maths and Business Centre

A new Maths and Business Centre has opened at Churchmead Church of England School in Datchet.

Dignitaries and school governors joined staff and students to celebrate the opening of the centre, funded by the Oxford Diocese, the Royal Borough of Maidenhead and Windsor Council and a Government grant for £270,000. An older building was gutted, redesigned and fitted with new classrooms and technology.

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We hope you enjoy reading *Pathways*. Email or write and let us know what you think. Contributor enquiries are welcome.

Pathways is published four times a year by the Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance. To receive the magazine regularly, or to order bundles for your church, please get in touch.

Follow us on Twitter and Facebook for local news and prayers.

To get in touch with *Pathways* call **01865 208200**, email us at communications@oxford.anglican.org or write to *Pathways* Magazine, Church House Oxford, Langford Locks, Kidlington, OX5 1GF



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Discipleship

Are you confident about living out your faith from Monday to Saturday? 59 per cent of Christians surveyed recently said their church does not equip them well for life in today's world.*

As 98 per cent of members of the Church of England are lay people, this suggests a lot of Christians would welcome an inspirational, ongoing conversation about their faith journey.

What are we doing about it?

Our churches are offering them just that conversation as part of our common vision for a more Christ-like Church. We've developed

Personal Discipleship Plans (PDPs), a life-changing process that hundreds of people have already embarked on.

The first step in the conversation is to nourish your inner spiritual life.

The next focuses on how you are being encouraged and supported to share your gifts and passions.



A PDP explores:

- **C**ore Gifts - What are my gifts? How am I sharing them?
- **A**ttracted by - Where may God be calling me?
- **L**istening - Where am I being guided to gain experiences?
- **L**ife - What else is going on in my life now? What is my ideal future?
- **E**xperience - What energises me? What challenges me?
- **D**iscipleship - How am I deepening my daily spiritual life and faith?

Enlightening

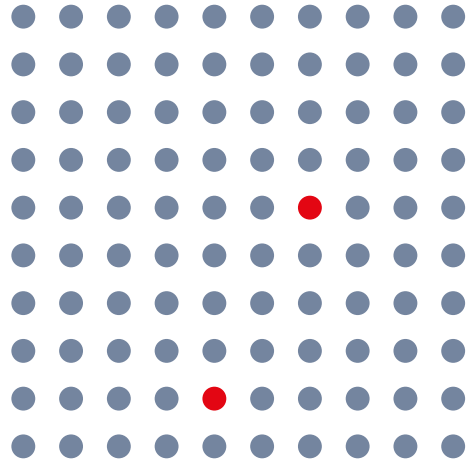
Fiona Fieldhouse from Burchetts Green, Berkshire, has had a PDP for 12 months and has found it inspirational, confidence building and enlightening. "At the same time as helping me to focus, I have somehow been enabled to also see a bigger picture. I am enjoying the experience and feel very supported," says Fiona.

The Revd Toby Wright, from the Benefice of Witney, says: "Whether people are new to faith or further on in their journey the process has shown itself adaptable and rewarding. Using PDPs has been one of the most transformational things I have done in my nine years here and I warmly commend it to others."

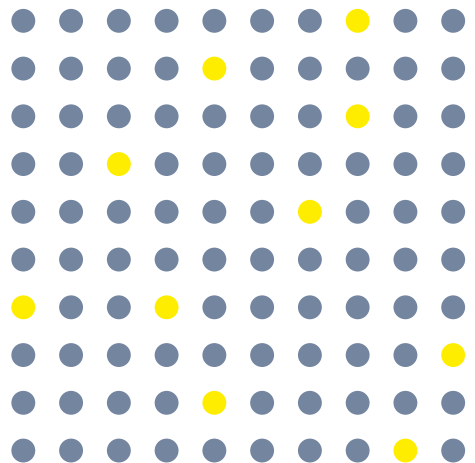
How can I sign up?

Speak to your vicar and they will help you through the process or see oxford.anglican.org/personal-discipleship-plans

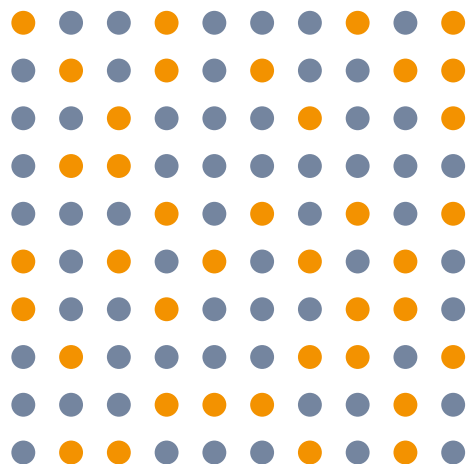
** Apprentice 2009, Spring Harvest/LICC. According to a survey of 2859 respondents conducted in 2009 (82% had been Christians for over 10 years, 67% in some kind of leadership role in the Church, 1204 were Anglicans)*



98 per cent of the Church of England are lay people



90 per cent of their lives are not in church but at home, in their community, at work, in the shops, with family, friends and colleagues



59 per cent of those surveyed said their church does not equip people well for life in today's world at home, at work or elsewhere.



Katie Tupling

We recently welcomed **The Revd Katie Tupling** as our new Chaplain among Deaf People and Disability Advisor.

Katie was born in Scarborough but moved around as a youngster. Her faith journey began when she was seven, when she had a sense of God's presence being very real, but had a lot of arguments with God around disability and her faith. Born with cerebral palsy, she didn't begin to walk until she was five.

"In my teens I used elbow crutches on and off and was provided with an NHS wheelchair that mostly gathered dust in the garage," she says. After major orthopaedic surgery in her early 20s, Katie now uses elbow crutches all the time. "I also have a most excellent purple wheelchair, which I love," she says.

As a youngster in Wales, Katie belonged to the church choir, and was an inquisitive member of the Sunday school. "I had a lot of questions for everybody and particularly my vicar, the Revd Ian Davies. Somehow, I worked my way through my dilemma between a loving God and the reality of disability, and I came out the other side with a clear call to ordination."

Katie tucked that calling away, but says it came back when she was in her mid-teens. "I thought it was a ridiculous idea because women were not allowed to be priests and I wanted to be an actor. The problem was that God moved mountains to allow women to become fully priested and I was no good as an actor." After A levels she took a year out working for the George Muller Foundation in Bristol, before her undergraduate theology degree at Westhill College, Birmingham.

At university Katie met her husband to be, Chris, who was training to be a primary school teacher. The couple found jobs, a house to rent and got married within eight weeks of graduating.

Katie had already begun her discernment process while an undergraduate in the Bath and Wells Diocese, a process she continued in Birmingham. She worked in telesales then in various churches as an out of school worker, before two years of ordination training at Oxford's Wycliffe Hall.

After a curacy in Belper, outside Derby, Katie's first incumbency was looking after three churches in Hathersage, Bamford and Grindleford in the Hope Valley before five years in the Sheffield Diocese as Vicar of Dore and Totley.

She was a disability adviser to the Bishops of Derby and Sheffield, is co-founder of Disability and Jesus and was part of the organising group for a disability conference at Lambeth Palace in 2018.

So how does Katie square the notion of an all loving, omnipotent God with her disability? "I have more of an issue with fellow human beings who treat my diagnosis and use of crutches/a wheelchair as a pitiable tragedy. That's disabling," she says.

"I hope that the Oxford Diocese could become a centre of excellence when it comes to Christians who are deaf and disabled living out their faith in an authentic way and teaching the able bodied and hearing church a huge amount."

And what advice would she give to someone struggling with a disability? "My advice would be to find your own identity. Don't panic. Disability isn't a bad word." ¶



See oxford.anglican.org/katietupling for a longer version of this feature and links to more resources.

Words and photo: Jo Duckles



Losing a loved one is painful and something we all face. In this edition of *Pathways* the **Revd Canon Dr Joanna Collicutt**, Advisor in Spiritual Care of Older People for the Diocese of Oxford, helps us to understand grief.

How to grieve

We will all experience grief, yet many of us don't know how to feel or what to do when it comes. Each bereavement is unique, and people are different. The best advice is to do what feels natural and what you need to get you through.

It used to be thought that grief consisted of stages, which included shock, anger, and depression. The final stage was the acceptance that your loved one had departed and you were able to 'move on'. Each of these stages was thought necessary for healthy grieving. Missing one or more was a sign that all was not well.

We now know these theories were wrong. Research has shown that grief journeys vary hugely. Most people show relatively low levels of distress and high levels of resilience. It's not compulsory to weep, get angry, or to feel despair; it doesn't mean you loved the deceased less. It's also fine to feel those things all mixed up with other emotions such as relief, fear or worry.

Those early theories also sold us the idea that we have to accept that our loved one has gone forever. Grieving is not so much about saying goodbye or achieving closure, but about coming to have a sense of our loved one as both present and absent. A big part of this is placing or relocating the person, at the burial or in placing the ashes if there has been a cremation. We want the remains to be in a place that is fitting, and one we can access. We need to know where they are and to be able to visit them, in imagination or in person.

We also need to make a place for the deceased in our minds; a place of fond memories, of thinking about what they would say or do in the situations

we face; a place of affection where we rejoice in a continuing - if different - bond with them. We make these places by remembering well: continuing to talk about our loved ones; carrying out actions and traditions that we associate with them (on special occasions I use my mother's best china tea set and I always put the milk in last, as she did); repeating their catch-phrases; doing things because they would have been proud of us or delighted for us. We can do this alone and with others.

This is also how Jesus asked us to remember him: 'Whenever you break bread together, think of me.'; 'When you pray, say *Abba* as I do'; 'Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another'.

Above all, because of Jesus' resurrection we "do not grieve as others do who have no hope." (1 Thessalonians 4:13b) for we:

"...remember before God all those who rejoice with us, but upon another shore and in a greater light, that multitude which no man can number, whose hope was in the Word made flesh, and with whom, in this Lord Jesus, we for evermore are one."

Taken from the *Bidding Prayer* from *The Service of Nine Lessons and Carols*. ¶



Exploring issues around death

Our new Death and Life resources are designed to equip churches to help people face mortality and prepare for death. For more information, visit deathlife.org.uk

Photo: Shutterstock

United we picnic

Jesus never hosted a meal. He never put a rota together to ensure he had quiche and cold meats. In our unsettling times, we too can harness the hospitality around us to share food and stand in solidarity with others.

My area of Reading is wonderfully diverse in many ways. With worrying reports of racially-motivated attacks after the Brexit referendum, our church, made up of around 15 nationalities, asked how we might respond with hope in the face of fear. We went for a bring-and-share picnic in the park, inviting as many community groups as possible to join in.

Around 300 people came. Neighbours from the four corners of the world, Leavers and Remainers, people from churches, mosques, temples, as well as Pride and the Humanist Assembly, all gathered. It was great fun and an incredibly moving day. For months afterwards, people from the Polish community left flowers outside the doors of our church to thank us for bringing people together. It was a simple response to those who would stoke fearfulness and division.

The picnic was also an outworking of our corporate reading of the way Jesus shared meals. Jesus never hosted a meal. He never put a rota together to ensure he had quiche and cold meats. Rather he assumed and leaned on the hospitality that was already there in the people around him and invited those near him to come and share in it. As with the parables, these meals took the ordinary encounters and experiences of life and animated them. Rules of culture and creation were broken or reversed so that foot-washing,

bread, wine, and company became something more. Holiness was no longer like dancing around traps, but a response to the gravitational-like pull of grace in Jesus that invited, challenged, delighted, and drew humanity to seek wholeness.

The Kingdom of God is a feast, and the gospels record the ways Jesus invited those he met to come and join in. Illness, poverty, piety, social class, and ritual uncleanness were being stripped of their power to stigmatise and separate by the grace of God. All who were wearied by such burdens and fear were invited to participate in the joy and fulness of life for the first time, rather than just be spectators.

In a nation marked by loneliness and fear, invitations to share hospitality speak deeply to souls starved of connection to others, to their own selves, to the future, and to God. In such times, people can catch glimpses, tastes, and stories of the togetherness of the Kingdom and the holy Christ who is drawing everything to himself. This gravitational force of grace speeds those running toward God, slows those fleeing from him, and steadies those caught in lukewarm confusion. All from a simple invitation, any of us can make, to share in hospitality with our neighbours. ¶

Words: The Revd Graeme Fancourt, photo: Steven Buckley

Looking for further inspiration? On 21-23 June, communities up and down the country will be getting together to celebrate kindness, respect and all we have in common. Find out more at greatgettogether.org



Assisted dying



The Revd Andrew Lightbown blogs regularly about ethical issues, including the relationship between faith and economics.

I am slowly nudging towards acceptance of assisted dying in some, carefully controlled, circumstances. That said, assisted dying is a complex ethical issue and I recognise that the composition of a supportive Christian ethic is fraught with difficulties.

The Bible cannot be mined to find the odd verse which would support assisted suicide. It frequently speaks about the sanctity of life. In considering whether Christian ethics might allow for assisted suicide, we are drawn into a reflection on the nature of scripture. I am happy to affirm that the Bible contains everything necessary for salvation, but I do not believe that it is able to speak directly into every contemporary ethical conundrum. Others will disagree.

I first became interested in assisted suicide in 2006 when Dr Anne Turner, who was suffering from

Progressive Supranuclear Palsy, decided to end her life at Dignitas. Anne was the mother of an old school friend.

In 2008 my interest was further piqued when a young rugby player,

Daniel James, became paraplegic and ended his life in Switzerland. The former England rugby player Brian Moore wrote about Daniel's decision and the impact on his parents in *The Daily Telegraph*. Brian, who I don't think would describe himself

as a theologian, finished his article with a reflection on the nature of divine judgement. The stimulus for nudging towards acceptance is vested in my reflections on the nature of God as articulated through some of the big theological motifs: mercy, judgement and love; alongside free-will.

Perhaps the Christian journalist John Cartwright was on to something when he suggested in

"Composition of a supportive Christian ethic is fraught with difficulties"

Andrew's article continues overleaf

In each edition of *Pathways*, we ask two Christians with different perspectives to explore a topical issue. A recent poll by the Royal College of Physicians asked doctors whether the law should permit assisted dying. The results were controversial: 43 per cent voted against, 32 per cent in favour and 25 per cent were neutral. The College has now adopted a neutral position. Should we?

One of the hardest things in the world is to witness unbearable suffering in someone you love. Surely you wouldn't let an animal go on like this. Isn't it the most compassionate decision to end their suffering?

These are the understandable feelings behind demands for assisted dying to be legalised. Many propose that the UK should follow the practice of other countries where, within tightly controlled safeguards, a person who is terminally ill can choose assisted dying.

After years of caring for people with cancer, including members of my own family, I am not convinced that this is a safe or wise option for our society. 'Of course, as a religious person, you would object,' I have been told. My concerns, however, are far more practical and professional than theological.

"Human ambivalence is a far messier reality"

It's easy to look at alternatives through rose-tinted glasses. We tend to underestimate the difficulties, and the very real suffering, which assisted dying can create. The ideal of a peaceful death can be frustrated by the

deep anxieties and conflicts which arise.

Even within the closest of families, who can be sure that the time and place are right for such an irrevocable decision?

Some people are remarkably clear-headed in their thinking. Many of the advocates for a change in policy

are well educated, informed, and articulate people. They are used to being in control. Imagining themselves in some future state of degrading dependence, they would like to guarantee, in advance, a legal and reliable escape route.

Human ambivalence is a far messier reality. The way we feel about the worth and quality of life can shift considerably, especially when we are vulnerable.



Margaret Whipp is a chaplain for the Churchill Hospital and a former Consultant Oncologist.

Margaret's article continues overleaf

[Andrew...]

an article in *The Guardian* that God, by his very nature, could not delight in a patient being kept alive with no hope for the alleviation of pain and suffering. Could it possibly be that final gift of an all-loving God at times of unbearable suffering is not life, but choice?

Many Christians will argue that God will judge harshly those who choose to walk alongside a loved one to their self-determined death. But here is the dilemma: would a reluctance or refusal to journey with a loved one who has made their final and absolute choice about what, in their eyes, constitutes a good death, constitute the sin of abandonment? The Jesus who freely gave up his own life told a parable about the consequences of abandonment and neglect: the Parable of the Sheep and Goats.

Interestingly, Brian Moore, in his *Daily Telegraph* article, reflected on the nature of divine judgement writing that 'among the many letters Daniel's parents will get there will be a handful which will suggest they will be punished on the final day. To such authors I say; if you reserve judgement for God, why usurp this by presupposing the conclusion? If there is a God, I believe he will understand what was done and why.'

God, at the end of the day, is nothing if not merciful. ¶

[Margaret...]

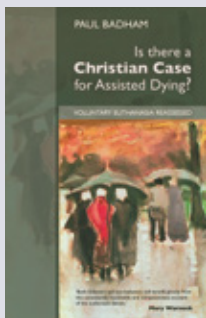
It is not uncommon for someone who has protested their desire for death to change their mind, once their fears have been addressed. Life feels much sweeter when we are assured of the care of others who will travel the journey with us.

These deep uncertainties make it hard to shape a tight regulatory framework. Despite repeated drafts and attempts, our lawmakers cannot agree the safeguards which would reliably exclude abuse. It is particularly hard to ensure that a frightened person is acting freely, with capacity and consent. In practice, many people facing illness and decline can feel themselves to be a burden or lapse into a state of depression. Who is to judge that their request for death is not smothering a deeper cry for help? One of the serious unintended consequences of legalising assisted dying has been a changing attitude, in some countries, towards people with disabilities. It is a mistake to imagine that individual values and choices will have no impact on the perceptions, or the self-worth, of more vulnerable members of society whose lives could easily be discounted.

As a priest and physician who has been privileged to walk alongside the dying, I often pause to reflect that it is precisely in our weakness that we feel most deeply connected to one another. Perhaps, as a Christian, that should come as no surprise. ¶

Further reading

The online version of *Pathways* includes links to newspaper articles cited in this piece **oxford.anglican.org/head-to-head** The Christian Medical Fellowship has spoken out against the move to neutrality **cmf.org.uk/advocacy** See also 'How to Grieve' on page 10.



"...a serious and important contribution to a serious and important debate."

Revd Dr John Polkinghorne

Two books from either side of the assisted dying debate could be worth a read if you're interested in exploring the topic further. Paul Badham is a Patron of Dignity in Dying. Vaughan Roberts is the Rector of St Ebbe's in Oxford and Director of the Proclamation Trust.



"...a compelling case for vehemently opposing a change [in the law]."

Dimitry Simmons,
Clinical Nurse
Specialist

Growing new congregations

Reaching out to people who are untouched by church because they are physically, or culturally, just too far away

Each edition of *Pathways* explores one of seven focus areas for our common life together. The focus areas aren't a description of everything the Church does, but they do represent the areas that we think God is currently calling us to pay particular attention to as we seek to become a more Christ-like Church.

In this issue we take a look at an ambitious plan to grow as many as 750 new congregations. It's a response to rapid social and environmental changes across this Diocese, and it's a plan that needs and involves all of us if it is to succeed. But it's not about new church buildings.

Did you know?

- In our larger conurbations, less than one person in 100 attends a Church of England Sunday service.
- Areas of our towns and cities are experiencing high levels of poverty and inequality, and have been under-resourced in clergy.
- A population at least the size of Edinburgh will move into this Diocese over the next fifteen years. This is both a pastoral challenge and a great mission opportunity.

Jesus was present and engaged with his people and as a Christ-like church we are called to be present and engaged in every community: big and small, urban and rural, old and new, right where that community is.

We now have new opportunities for us to reach out to those who are untouched by traditional church because they are physically, or culturally, just too far away. If every church began to plan for at least one new congregation or missional project, then we could see as many as 750 new congregations. **Turn over the page to find out more.**



We hope to invest £5m in growing new congregations over the next five years. By God's grace that investment will translate into two new 'Resourcing Hubs', five projects that will grow and support a congregation of 100+ people, and at least 50 new Fresh Expressions of church of any shape or size.

From Autumn 2019 parishes, benefices and deaneries will be able to bid for grants from a new development fund to support the growth of new congregations.

Fresh Expressions

Fresh Expressions are new forms of church that emerge within contemporary culture and engage primarily with those who don't 'go to church'. This might be a youth congregation based in a school, a Messy Church that grows new disciples, or a church for those suffering addictions. There's no one model, and the possibilities are endless.

Church grafts and church plants

Church plants take members from an existing congregation to a new place. Church grafts are people moving from one church to another, often to assist a church that is struggling, or into a new area of housing. There are lots of examples of this kind of activity already taking place in the Diocese.

Resourcing hubs

Resourcing hubs are large churches that want to 'give themselves away.' They offer resources, ideas and a forum for learning where it is needed, where it is wanted and in a way that's right for the local context. Our first resourcing hub is Greyfriars Church in Reading which has funding for an additional curate who will put down roots in the deanery and gather a team around them ahead of grafting into a local parish.

Not every initiative requires funding to get going (see opposite page) and we want to encourage creativity and experimentation in approaches to growing new congregations across the Diocese. With this in mind, we're also launching a new parish discernment tool during the summer to help parishes recognise where God is already at work and what might be needed next. ¶



To find out more about this focus area and the tools and funds to assist you, visit oxford.anglican.org/commonvision



7

We are inclusive and love anyone who turns up on Sunday. We have lots of comments about the love and friendship that is so clear to people when they walk in.

Grow a new congregation

Swinbrook@11 began in October 2017, when 20 people were sent from St John the Baptist, Burford, a thriving but overflowing rural church. **Alex Ross** describes ten things that have contributed to the new congregation growing ever since.

1

We aim to make the 11am service the best hour of the week for all of us. A little bit of heaven in a troubled world where we can meet with God.

2

Every Sunday we aim to pass on the teaching of Jesus and the teaching about Jesus. We have Bibles in the pews so people can read the stories for themselves.

3

We have three great musicians; the music inspires worship. We have 50 per cent ancient hymns and 50 per cent modern songs.

4

Prayer, prayer and more prayer! Prayer is a central focus for all of us.

5

Anyone is welcome to attend our Monday evening prayers. They can join in spoken prayer or pray silently.

6

We have four home-groups and are always on the lookout for people to offer their homes for a group or to be leaders.

8

We have lots of different teams, and we look for everyone who sees themselves as a regular to be involved in some way in the church family.

9

We eat together regularly: breakfasts in church, lunches in the village hall or pub, meals in homes, picnics and barbeques.

10

We visit each home in the village three times a year with invitations for Easter, harvest and Christmas. Lots of people have come as a result.

Laughter

'A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones.' Proverbs 17:22

Laughter is the best medicine is a well-known adage, and it's right there in the Bible. It's important to have a good laugh; we've even run clergy laughter workshops in the Diocese. *Pathways* asked Ian Macdonald to explain how laughter can lift all of us up in these challenging times.

There's a photograph doing the rounds on social media of two pieces of graffiti on a whitewashed wall. The first artist sprays the stark statement, 'Life is Pain!' A second person has added 'au chocolat'. The meaning is now completely changed, and it's both funny and brutally profound. Life is tough... but we can still find the humour in it.

Laughter is extraordinary, beautiful and absurd. Science backs this up. Laughter lowers adrenalin and cortisol in our systems, releases feel-good endorphins, acts as a natural pain-killer, boosts the immune system, increases the oxygen supply to our body and brain, brings people together and lifts our mood.

'laughter is carbonated holiness' Anne Lamott

Did you know that 80 per cent of our laughter as human beings is not derived from jokes? Laughter mainly happens as part of our social interaction, play and communication. Most of the time we are choosing to laugh or laughing because laughter is infectious. This is the principle at the heart of our clergy laughter workshops.

Can you really choose to laugh? Yes, you can. You can probably recall people laughing when the boss cracked a poor joke, or even in response to a predictable sermon joke. Consider how

easily and often children laugh (and are freer to cry). Perhaps that's why Jesus suggested we should become like them. Laughing is a way of recovering the joy and emotion that we may have lost or suppressed along the way.

Here are two lovely examples from a laughter workshop:

- A man followed the suggestion of choosing to laugh when he woke up. The absurdity of it, and the sound of himself laughing, made him laugh even more.
- A woman shared how much happier she feels after using part of her car journey to work to practise laughing.

Life is hard at times. Verses like 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted' and 'Jesus wept' show that God is with us in our troubles. Equally, he understands our need for laughter and joy.

"Now Sarah said, 'God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.'"
Gen 21:6

'He will yet fill your mouth with laughter, and your lips with shouts of joy.' Job 8:21 📖

Photo composite:
Shutterstock / Emma Nawrocki / Gavin Micklethwaite

Life is pain
au chocolat

Laughter facts

- laughter is something you get better at with practice
- laughter is infectious
- learning to laugh at ourselves is incredibly healing
- in laughter workshops, we always laugh with others

Dig deeper

James Cary is a BBC sitcom-writer, a theologian and a member of the General Synod. His new book *The Sacred Art of Joking* has been described as '...part radical pamphlet urging Christianity to embrace its latent sense of humour.'

Why not try dwelling in the Word in your church or home group? The spring edition of *Pathways* tells you how and comes with a handy resource sheet for you to download and print out. Find it online at oxford.anglican.org/how-to-dwell-in-the-word/

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶ for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

...

¹² As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³ Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

These verses are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible

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Dwelling in the Word

Did you know that every Bishop's staff meeting starts with dwelling in the Word? This edition of *Pathways* asks people around the Diocese about the difference it can make for any small group or church meeting.

This year we are encouraging everyone in the Diocese to dwell on *Colossians 1:15-20* and *3:12-17* (opposite page). If you've never tried it, dig out the Spring edition of *Pathways* and find out how dwelling in the Word can help groups listen to scripture, to each other and to God.

"It's a gentle, but powerful process," says the Revd Mark Bennet, Team Rector at Thatcham. "I've heard it described several times as a listening exercise, but it is more than that, and I prefer to describe it as an exercise in paying attention.

"Because the people I meet as partners in the process speak for me, I lose control of what I have said - they even get to decide whether what I said was worth sharing," says Mark. "And if I listen carefully to what they tell others, I get valuable feedback on what someone else has heard me say.

"The fact that my partner is 'a reasonably friendly looking stranger' means that they are unfamiliar with me and my foibles and can't use their personal experience of conversation with me to decode what I am saying. How often do we get such valuable feedback on the way we speak of our faith?" Eileen Fletcher, from Woosehill, adds: "It got people talking about scripture in a way that few other processes do. Personal Bible study is great - but hearing what others see in the Word is fascinating."

Dwelling in the Word has even transformed PCC meetings at All Saints, Wokingham. "There was resistance at first as people struggled to get the benefits. But now we'd miss it if we stopped," says the Revd David Hodgson. "It focuses us on God from the start and helps us to share our faith experiences. We also use it sometimes in small groups at Sunday morning worship instead of a sermon."

Speaking to Bishop Steven in an episode of the *My (extraordinary) Family* podcast, Bishop Andrew spells out the difference the process has made for the Berkshire Area Team. "It's very important for all of us to have somewhere we can really connect deeply with our colleagues and hear what God is saying. God is always at work in this world for good, however things appear to be, and it's a matter of trying to notice what he is doing, and who God is sending to you." ¶



Episode 3 of *My (extraordinary) Family* explores dwelling in the Word and the impact of Partnership for Missional Church. Listen at blogs.oxford.anglican.org

Be Still and Know

God of mystery, where are you
When the world flings demands
Like a rain squall at the window,
When the pressure to perform steals us from ourselves,
When grasping for our future leaves us empty handed?

Where are you, when confusion is in heady ascendance,
When digging for surety lacerates and fragments?
Where are you in the fray,
In the tangled threads of feeling with no beginning or end?

God of our depths, be with us.
Do not rescue, but hold us;
Befriend, and reacquaint us
With our roots, our core, our true desires.

Help us to know, the simplicity of refreshment;
a single raindrop on dry lips like an offering, unsolicited,
from a cloudless sky.

Help us to know, how slowly moves the deep;
our connection to earth and stars, and the life that is you.

Help us to know, that beyond our striving and our need
All you are is love,
And all we have is you.

Prayer by Alison Webster



What does it mean to be a contemplative church? For useful resources visit [oxford.anglican.org/a-contemplative-church/](https://www.oxford.anglican.org/a-contemplative-church/)

Many people are frazzled by fast-paced modern lives in a society where taking time out for prayer and contemplation feels counter-cultural. Why not take a few minutes out from your schedule and say this prayer? You can also find a daily prayer diary on the diocesan website.

Barbara, Donald, Jonny and Jenny told me...

Our family were not church goers. The first person who taught me about faith was my Nan, Barbara. She had a quiet, but resolute faith. I remember learning how prayer formed part of her everyday life. She always made sure we knew she was praying for us. I went with her to her church. However, at 13 I knew everything and made a point of telling the vicar this! I was most likely more than a bit annoying – so I don't blame him for asking me to leave the confirmation classes. I left the church, for good, I thought. My Nan continued praying though...

By the time I went to university I was hardened against religion. I saw no evidence for God and thought it was better to engage in solving the world's problems through left-leaning politics. All this changed through a (random) sequence of events. Doctors thought a friend with meningitis was going to die. Her mum was a Christian who set off a prayer chain. The friend made an unexpected recovery. I always thought prayer was to do with positive thinking, and this experience challenged my lack of proof for God's existence. The chaplaincy at university had a mission week coming up. The speaker was Methodist preacher and political activist, Donald English. In five days, I got to explore many aspects of faith I struggled with. Donald inspired me to see that true

transformation for our world will come through the coming of the Kingdom of God.

That set me on a slightly different journey resulting in me (randomly) choosing to join a Christian youth work agency. This team was led by a couple called Jonny and Jenny. So much about them was inspiring. They modelled an equality in their relationship, at home and at work, which I have sought to emulate. They introduced me to studying theology as a way of seeking a 'transforming vision' for the whole of life. The worship events they ran, along with others, led me to find an irreverent yet deep spirituality that brought God to life.

Since then there have been many others as companions in the way of faith. My wife Bridget is the number one provoker and supporter for this journey. In another (random) connection we now have the privilege of Jonny and Jenny's grandchildren being in our church. I can now pray for them, like my Nan did for me... 🙏

As told to Pathways by Nick Shepherd

Nick Shepherd is the director of Setting God's People Free which aims to help Christians in their everyday faith. Hear him talking with Bishop Steven: blogs.oxford.anglican.org/nick-shepherd



Who told you? If you'd like to share how others helped you on your own journey to faith, then please get in touch with us at communications@oxford.anglican.org

Christ Church Cathedral



An invitation to visit your Cathedral

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