

 Diocese of Worcester

archdeacons' visitation news

Growing as Kingdom People

As part of our Growing as Kingdom People vision, we have a clear set of priorities as we look forward to 2030. We hope that these will make a difference in reversing the decline in numbers in our churches and bring more people to faith.

Over the next few years, we aim to:

- double the number of children and young people worshipping in our churches compared to 2019 figures, investing in more paid children's, families' and youth workers so that we have at least one church with a flourishing young peoples' ministry in each major area of population, and two such churches in each deanery;
- create 100 new worshipping communities offering a range of ways for people to come to faith and worship God;
- invest in the renewal of a number of our churches to ensure that each major area of population has at least one church with 150 people attending weekly, enabling them to support other local churches;
- invest in our clergy and lay leaders, providing training and development opportunities to enable them to grow and feel supported and equipped for mission. We want to make the Diocese of Worcester one of the most attractive places in which to minister.



This newsletter features articles exploring each of these priorities in more detail. By dedicating time, energy and resources to these areas, we hope that all churches will be able to thrive in their own contexts. There is something for everyone in our plan – alongside these key priorities, we will continue our support for smaller churches, develop our rural strategy and continue to offer Mission Accompanier support for all churches that wish to become healthier and more sustainable.

Please continue to pray for our whole diocese as we work through these priorities. Pray that by 2030 we will have healthy and sustainable churches alive with people who are worshipping God, sharing hope, making other disciples and transforming their communities.

Thank you!

Thank you for all you do and are as churchwardens, serving your parishes faithfully and at some cost.

In this newsletter there are plenty of exciting ideas for transformation and change. Alongside this, never forget the value of what you do week-in, week-out. Authentic Anglicanism is about hallowing the ordinary, offering our regular worship for what it is – the gateway to heaven. So, do what you do as well as you can; remember the Church and its community are indeed holy ground.

It may well be that here in the regular worship and service of your church, not especially shiny or new, but faithful and, above all, from the heart, people catch a glimpse of glory. Just as bread and wine is taken and becomes the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, so we offer ourselves and God works his miracle of love through us.

May God bless you.



The Ven Robert Jones
Archdeacon of Worcester



The Ven Nikki Groarke
Archdeacon of Dudley

An alternative route to ordination

15 people from parishes across the diocese have started a new training course with the hope that many of them will be able to be ordained over the next couple of years.

The Auxiliary Pathway is aimed at those who see their vocation as being non-stipendiary ministers to churches in their local area. People were nominated by their incumbents to be part of the two-year training scheme and there was an initial process of discernment through an interview. 15 people started on the pathway last September and during the training they will go through the full national discernment process to test their vocation. Some will do this within the first year and others will continue onto the second year with a view to ordination in 2024.

The pathway is led by Director of Ordinands and Vocation, John Fitzmaurice, with support from Doug Chaplin, our Lay Training and Discipleship Officer, as well as our new Director of Mission and Ministry. The candidates also receive training from both our bishops.

John said: "It was amazing that so many people came forward to explore this pathway. We interviewed all of those who were nominated to ensure that this particular route was the best one for them and this affirmed existing vocations for some. Those who started the pathway are continuing through the process of discernment while they train. It had been originally expected that this process would be completed so they could be ordained at the end of the first year, but backlogs in the national discernment process along with some of our candidates wanting to take a bit more time, has meant that some will be ordained during the second year of training. And of course, some may decide that ordination isn't the right path for them."

Dean Hall from Tardebigge in Redditch & Bromsgrove Deanery was licensed as a Reader in September 2021. He runs the church's 'Café Church' alongside his wife Jane. He said: "In my head and heart I felt I'd completed my ministerial journey. Café Church has been working really well and I'd never considered ordination to be part of my calling. When the opportunity to join the Auxiliary Pathway came along, I prayed about it and had a number of conversations with the training team. In the end I decided that if



fall! This pathway is an excellent opportunity – not a shortcut to ordination, but a chance to take our ministerial gifts deeper in our own contexts."



Linda Nicholas is a Churchwarden and Reader at St Peter's Church in Ipsley, Redditch. She said: "I had thought about ordination previously but wasn't sure I was called to that ministry. However, I have been doing funeral ministry as a Reader and had a sense recently that people wanted a vicar. I had prayed about it and when I saw the Auxiliary Pathway,

it felt like an answer to that prayer. The training is magnificent! It is locally based, and I've found it fun. It's very strange because we don't know yet whether we will actually be ordained, but we have regular meetings with the diocesan team and I feel very encouraged – I'm now starting to believe that I can do it! Everyone has their ups and downs through the training, but we're a very friendly bunch and all support each other. I have built friendships through the course."



Jen Jones is Churchwarden of Kyre Wyard and Stoke Bliss churches in Teme Valley South. She has been training for Reader ministry, assuming she was too old to start thinking about ordination. She said: "When the opportunity arose to be part of the Auxiliary Pathway, I was in floods of tears, it seemed like a brilliant opportunity. It's been hard work, as I'm still doing the

Reader training course to help with my theological knowledge and also didn't retire from my paid work until the end of March, but I'm really enjoying it. The encouragement from the training team has been brilliant and it's been invaluable to hear the Bishops' own journeys. I am excited about the possibility of working within my community as an ordained minister, to preside at communion and to connect with and help people from many different backgrounds."

John Fitzmaurice continued: "The whole group are a delight to work with and are very supportive of each other. This is an initial two-year pilot, so we'll be evaluating it at the end of the second year to decide if it is something we continue with in future years. Please pray for all of those who are following this pathway."



Developing New Worshipping Communities

Our diocesan priorities include something for everyone who wants to see their church grow.

By 2030, we hope to have created 100 new worshipping communities, offering a range of ways for people to come to faith and worship God. This is something that all churches can get involved with, thinking about ways to reach out to people in our community and provide new opportunities for us all to worship together.

Archdeacon Nikki said: "Church can be a really scary place for those who haven't been before, and people aren't always free on Sunday mornings. We therefore want to encourage new forms of worship aimed at those who don't already come to church, at different times and on different days. Some of these will take place in the church buildings but many will be held elsewhere.

"There are already some really great examples of where this is happening. Forest Church is working well with young families, Café Church provides a different way to engage with worship and some of our rural churches gather for 'Walking Church'. It is an opportunity to be really imaginative with the worship that we offer and a reminder that a traditional service on a Sunday morning isn't the only way for people to develop their faith."

We are working in partnership with 'Myriad' to support churches on this journey and provide training opportunities. A diocesan New Worshipping Communities Enabler will be based in the Saltway Team in Droitwich and they will also be assisted by a Myriad-funded part-time administrator. Both will be able to work with any parish and offer training pathways and networking/mentoring opportunities.

"Working with a Mission Accompanier can also help parishes to identify where the opportunities might be," said Nikki. "Mission Accompaniers walk alongside parishes in their journey to become healthier and more sustainable and all parishes can be connected with one, completely free of charge. We know that we need to find ways to reverse the decline in numbers of people coming to church. Trying to establish a new worshipping community is a good way to engage your local community and show how Jesus can change people's lives."



Reaching out to children and young people



Ness Everitt, School Chaplain

As a diocese, we plan to double the number of children and young people in our churches compared to 2019 figures. One of the key learnings from the Calling Young Disciples project was that connecting with children, young people and families is best done by workers embedded in the

parish or local area. As a result, we are looking to recruit at least two employed children's and young people's workers in each deanery, funded through applications to the Healthier Churches Fund alongside an application to the national Church for funding to renew churches in Dudley and Redditch.

Simon Hill, Diocesan Children and Youth Adviser, is working with parishes who would like to explore recruiting a children's and young people's worker. He said: "We would like to create a network where children's and young people's workers can support each other and share ideas. Each worker will be based in a particular parish, but they will also be able to work with other local churches. We are encouraging churches to be ambitious and I can help link up different parishes who might just need someone for a few hours a week."

The Healthier Churches Fund has already given grants for youth and children's workers in Malvern Link with Cowleigh, Pershore and Kempsey. The funding for Malvern Link with Cowleigh enabled a school chaplain post at Dyson Perrins CE Secondary School to become full time with the role also supporting two primary schools in the parish. Ness Everitt was appointed to the role last November. She said:

"This is an amazing, diverse role. It gives me the chance to get to know students across three schools, to be with them, listen to them and talk to them about God. I am also able to provide a bridge between the church, the school and wider community. For example, I'm taking a group of students to do some volunteering with the Community Fridge based at St Matthias Church. I'm also looking for volunteers from our churches to come into Dyson Perrins to be mentors for the young people. I'm thrilled to be able to be in a role that enables me to be real with my faith and I am excited to see how God will use me!"

Simon would be delighted to hear from any parish that wants to explore having a children's and young people's worker.

Contact him on shill@cofe-worcester.org.uk



Brierley Hill Church



Stourbridge St Thomas

Investing in Church renewal

By 2030, we are hoping to have a church with an average weekly attendance of 150 in each of our areas of major population. To kickstart this priority, we applied to the Church Commissioners for funding and the national Church has agreed in principle to partner with us on investing in six churches in Greater Dudley Deanery as well as St Stephen's Church in Redditch.

In Greater Dudley Deanery there will be investments made in Halesowen, Brierley Hill, Stourbridge, Netherton and Old Hill, Sedgley and Kingswinford. Funding will enable different interventions into each church depending on what is needed, but will be mission focussed and typically enable staff appointments to facilitate growth, along with support to improve the building and enable community transformation.

Area Dean, David Hoskin, said: "Greater Dudley deanery has a population of 350,000 people, which is 40% of the Diocese of Worcester. Although there is lots of great work going on in our churches, we're only managing to attract a small number of these people and have acknowledged that we need to make major changes to make a difference. We have been encouraged by the experience of Top Church which now has an overall average weekly attendance of over 150 and want to see similar transformation happening in other places."

The funding from the Church Commissioners will enable resources to be brought in which will help churches to grow and new disciples to be made, and as those churches grow, they will

be able to support other churches in the borough. Although just six churches will receive this external investment, there is funding support for other churches that wish to grow from our diocesan Healthy Churches Fund.

Assistant Area Dean, Andrew Sillis said: "This is a really exciting investment by the national Church into Dudley. When it was discussed at our deanery synod, we spent time in prayer and there was a real sense that the Holy Spirit is behind these plans to resource and renew churches in our area. We want to see God at work among us and enable all our churches to play their part in transforming our community and turn struggle into joy!"

St Stephen's Church in Redditch will also benefit from the Church Commissioners' investment. Located in Redditch town centre, it is seen by many as the main church in the town. The funding will enable St Stephen's to develop a different style of worship which we hope will attract a younger congregation, as well as enable the church to become a hub which can resource other local churches.

Area Dean of Redditch and Bromsgrove, Paul Lawlor, said: "Our 'Revitalising Redditch' plan creates a mission area with the 12 churches in Redditch working together and sharing resources while enabling each of our churches to keep their own identity. The funding for St Stephen's will be a key part of this plan, enabling extra ministry and improvements to the building which will help it to flourish so that it can also support the other churches locally, helping to ensure they can also become healthier and more sustainable."

These initial renewal projects will be the first phase of our plan to have a church with an average weekly attendance of 150 in each of our major population areas. We are now developing detailed plans for each church involved, with some changes starting this year and others happening over the coming years. The funding from the Church Commissioners will also enable us to employ a Renewals Manager based in one of the churches to ensure our plans stay on track and we learn from each renewal.

Archdeacon of Dudley, Nikki Groarke, said: "The next few years are going to be very exciting ones in our diocese. This investment from the national Church should enable us to make a real step change in bringing more people to a living faith in Jesus. It's a long-term vision as we continue to grow as Kingdom People; worshipping God, sharing hope, making disciples and transforming our communities."

For more information

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