

 Diocese of Worcester

archdeacons' visitation news

Mission Accompaniers make a difference to churches

The Mission Accompanier scheme started in the spring of 2022. Funded by the Healthier Churches Fund, Mission Accompaniers come alongside parishes over an 18-month to two-year period, helping them to think about what health and sustainability looks like in their context/setting/tradition. To date, 24 Mission Accompaniers have supported 64 churches in 35 contexts (parishes/groups/teams).

Feedback on the scheme

Feedback from clergy has suggested that the Accompaniers offer the right mix of encouraging, supportive and challenging input, bringing appropriate levels of honesty, whilst facilitating positive, insightful change. "It was good to see a group of people challenged around our context and the challenges that we faced, and it was good to see the growth of different ideas. It was comforting and encouraging for me to have someone work with me."

"For me it's a growing in confidence. He came when I was going through a time of change and wasn't sure about things. For the church, it has opened up possibilities."

Outcomes so far

Many of the churches working with a Mission Accompanier have started or strengthened a new initiative as a result.

In one church, the Mission Accompanier helped them to open up for Heritage Days, which helped bring new people. The Incumbent said: "We have made really good links with the schools and also worked on Places of Welcome. Individuals from two care homes have started coming regularly on a Sunday along with their carers. We also have a young family who have started coming. We try to do a few things well, noticing where things are being really fruitful and being brave to stop things that aren't."

Another incumbent said: "My own ability to work as a leader has been transformed. But also, there has been growth in ownership and confidence of the PCC. We went for a children/family worker and that is bringing people into the church. We got a Kingdom People Fund grant and we now have half a dozen families. It's a model of how it could be."

Diocesan Leader of Transformation and Change, Archdeacon Nikki, said: "It is obvious from the feedback that Mission Accompaniers have been really appreciated by parishes and are making a difference in helping churches to grow. We are now looking at how we might be able to continue to support churches, helping them to understand who they are as a church and build on their individual strengths."

Thank you!



Thank you for all you do and are as Churchwardens, serving your parishes faithfully, diligently and sacrificially. Being new to this 'Archdeaconing' I am particularly thankful for all your good wishes and support over these first months in office. Nikki and I hope that you will be inspired and

encouraged by the updates on the progress of our diocesan priorities contained in this newsletter. Parishes, underpinned by grants from the Healthier Churches Fund, are already bearing fruit in increasing the number of children and young people worshipping in our churches, offering new and exciting ways for people to come to faith and worship God, the renewal of our churches, and through increased opportunities for training and development for mission.

Every church is different and we want to encourage and resource you all to thrive in your own context and in your own ways, as you worship God, make disciples, share hope, and transform your community.

May God bless you.

Mark Badger, Archdeacon of Worcester
Nikki Groarke, Archdeacon of Dudley

Supporting the growth of new worshipping communities



We are hoping to create 100 new worshipping communities (NWCs) by 2030, which will offer a more informal and relaxed form of worship, often in a different setting to the church building and help ensure we are offering a range of ways for people to come to faith and worship God.

There are already a number of new worshipping communities across the Diocese. Over the last two years, the ministry team in the parish of Bromsgrove have established three successful NWCs and they are just in the process of setting up a fourth.

Pizza Church

The longest-running new worshipping community in Bromsgrove parish is a café church, which has been renamed 'Pizza Church' by the children who attend. This takes place on Saturdays at 5pm in the church hall at St Godwald's Church in Finstall, on the edge of Bromsgrove. The format is similar to other café churches featuring food (or more accurately pizza), live music, songs, prayer and a sermon.

It is deliberately planned to be informal, fun and very inclusive in both style and theology. A core of 30 people attend regularly – mainly families with children who generally don't go to church anywhere else.

Twenty is Plenty

'Twenty is Plenty' takes place at Stoke Prior village church. It is a 20-minute time of worship and is specifically aimed at families with children. There is music and a brief talk as well as something creative to do to help familiarise the children with the church environment.

Soul and Senses

This takes place at All Saints in Bromsgrove town centre. It offers contemplative worship based around four or five prayer stations that follow a different theme each time. Those present gather for an initial time of worship, followed by time to move around the prayer stations while music plays in the background. It is tactile and about following the senses so no one talks. Everyone then gathers back together for the final worship.

Parish Café

Bromsgrove's newest offering is still in its early stages of development. St Luke's Church hasn't had a worshipping congregation for several decades but is in a part of the town that has no other worshipping community, so the team in Bromsgrove are using the NWC model as a way to try and breathe new life into it, a bit like a church plant.

To deliver all these NWCs and stay on track, those responsible for delivering each of these NWCs in Bromsgrove parish meet to reflect, plan, and pray together, as although each NWC is very different, they can learn from each other.

New Diocesan NWC Learning Pathway

To support those churches who are just starting a new worshipping community, leaders and their teams have formed a new learning pathway. It will meet every six months for two and a half years with mentoring and training provided in between the meetings. 32 people attended the first meeting, representing 11 different new worshipping communities, all of which are at different stages of development.

The Diocese has partnered with Myriad (part of the Gregory Centre for church multiplication) to deliver this new learning pathway. The parish teams will journey together, sharing their vision as well as encouraging and learning from each other.

After the first session, one of the participants commented: "Having sat through many similar events, I was a tad cautious, but found the whole day brilliantly put together, excellently delivered, beautifully and generously hosted and thoroughly enlivening, informative, visionary and fun! Our team is fired up!"

Support from the diocesan office

Funding has enabled a small team to be recruited to support all parishes as they look to develop new worshipping communities. This includes a part-time Administrator, Clare Ashworth, who played a key role in the smooth running of the first meeting of the learning pathway, and part-time NWC Enabler, Kim Brown.

Kim joined the Diocese in April from the Diocese of Gloucester where she was vicar of five rural churches. While there, her churches started two new youth clubs, a community meal and an outdoor eco-friendly family service. Before that, Kim helped to open a drop-in centre in Cirencester called The Upper Room, which grew into a new worshipping community. The team there journeyed with homeless young men, people who had been in care and others who had come out of prison, and young people with additional learning needs. They established a food bank, an intern scheme, a holiday playscheme, and saw many people come to faith and be baptised and confirmed.

She says, "I am very excited to be helping churches across the Diocese do new things to reach new people for Christ. Since I started, I have been so encouraged and excited at all the new and creative things that people are doing – alongside their work, childcare and family life. It is inspirational for me to see people seeking God for their community."

Parishes looking for support in establishing or developing a new worshipping community can find contact details for Clare and Kim on the diocesan website.



Children and families' workers across the Diocese

As we seek to double the number of children and young people worshipping in our churches by 2030 (from 2019 levels), a network of paid children and families' workers is growing across the Diocese.



Keri Robinson



Helen Laird

Norton and Wollaston, Stourbridge

Keri Robinson is the children and families worker at both St James' Church in Wollaston and St Michael's Church in Norton, on the edge of Stourbridge. She works part-time, with activities organised in each church and together.

Keri says, "We have a team of volunteers who have organised a series of outreach events for local families, getting to know people and building connections. The aim is to help local families on their own faith journeys with the hope that they will connect with church more regularly."

"There is a huge amount of potential in our local communities. It's great that families are willing to attend events at either church and we are continuing to develop links with St James' Primary School where I take assemblies and the church preschool at St Michael where I visit to do a song and prayer. We are also hoping to build closer links at the community school in St Michael's parish."

Working together in Worcester

Three churches in Worcester joined together to appoint a full-time children and young people's worker following a successful application to the Healthier Churches Fund. Helen Laird is working across the parishes of St John the Baptist in Claines and St Stephen's and St George's Barbourne in Worcester, building on their previous work with children and young people.

Helen says, "Each of the churches is very different in their style of worship and the activities that they offer, so there is a range of ways I can encourage them and different new worshipping communities to explore."

Helen has been reaching out to local schools and set up two 'Gather' after school services. She is a regular at the 'Little Stars' preschool group at St Stephen's Church and at the 'Little Friends' preschool group at Claines Church. She also helps to lead Sunday Stars, St Stephen's new worshipping community for families with small children, which acts as a follow-on to baptism.

Building a network

Both Keri and Helen connect with the developing diocesan network led by Simon Hill, the Programme Lead for Children and Young People in the Diocese. Keri said: "Simon is brilliant – I attend his meetings with other children and youth workers across the Diocese and we even had a retreat together. When you work on your own, it's good to know that there are others you can get support from. Our WhatsApp group is a particularly good way to ask for help or advice."

If your church would like to explore employing a children and families' worker or linking with other parishes to reach out to local children and young people, then do have a conversation with Simon Hill:

✉ shill@cofe-worcester.org.uk

Stewarding our churches' finances



**Stewardship and Resources Officer
Chris Boden writes:**

Many churches I visit describe themselves with words like family and community, and thinking about stewardship within family reveals some important messages. In the New Testament, the word *oikonomos* is used to describe

stewardship. This gives us the word 'economy' today and means the rules or customs of the house. So how can we think about stewardship in terms of our homes and family?

Mechanisms – families are full of people who are all different. Some visit occasionally and some are always there; some are tech wizards and have the latest gadgets, while others prefer pen and paper; some are financially comfortable, while others exist pay-day to pay-day. Our churches need to offer a variety of ways to give – not just cash on the plate, but regular giving with online banking or using a contactless card, to suit what works for the donor's situation and personality.

Impact and need – family members often help one another when they know there is a reason. This could be frequent (the bank of Mum and Dad), but sometimes it can be because life throws a curveball. Similarly, some people will always be willing to help our churches, and for them that is part of being in the family, while others will be happy to help but want to know the reason why. We need to explain why our churches need help and what impact these gifts will have for our communities.

Trust – trust needs to be built within families and we need to do the same within our churches. People want to know that their money will be going to the things they care about, that they are appreciated and that they feel part of your church's family. Think carefully about how you say thank you, this needs to be in a number of different ways so people hear it and feel it is genuine, a formal letter does not have the same impact as a card or a telephone call. Similarly, how you report the church's finances is important – celebrate good news and achievements, inviting all those who made them possible.

To become a Kingdom People, our churches' finances will always be challenging as we find new ways to engage our communities, but if we work together as a family to face these challenges then God's presence in our communities and homes will grow.

An update on our renewal churches



St Thomas' Church, Stourbridge

Our diocesan priority to ensure we have a church with a congregation of at least 150 in each major area of population in the Diocese has received significant support from the national Church. A number of our 'renewal churches' have now created detailed plans and are beginning to receive their funding.

St Thomas' Church, in Stourbridge town centre, is among six churches in Greater Dudley Deaney that are developing proposals to receive a share of the national Church funding (along with St Stephen's Church in Redditch). This funding will help renew the life of the churches and enable them to support other local churches.

At St Thomas' Church, the national funding will enable it to ensure its building is fit for purpose and it can truly serve all those who use the town centre.

Vicar Andrew Sillis says, "Our church is already open every day and people often pop in. We have been watching how the church building is being used by the community so that we can understand how to provide the warmest welcome. We have also been developing new worshipping communities to reach out to different groups, and the renewal project aims to plug the gaps such that we create discipleship journeys from baptism right through to seniors, offering numerous opportunities for people to discover Jesus and join us."

Alongside expanding their current monthly service for toddlers and their café church service, St Thomas' has realised that there are often

secondary school children in town after school with little to do and students from the local sixth form college also already come into church to have their lunch and find a quiet space to study.

Andrew continues: "We will be able to employ a children and families worker so that we can offer after school provision for older children, and changes to our building will make it more accessible. We are also planning to recruit a pioneer town centre minister to work with the students and with the night-time economy. Stourbridge is as busy at night as it is during the day with the last club closing at 2am. We're preparing for a new worshipping community on Friday and Saturday evenings with worship from 8pm, but then to engage spiritually and pastorally with those in the town centre late at night."

Around a third of the funding St Thomas receives will be spent on making adaptations to the building to facilitate the needs of the different groups. They are hoping to remodel the nave of the church and install heating under a new floor. This will create a more flexible space for worship, but also enable other community use of the building including for concerts and exhibitions. The church also has aspirations to be net zero carbon once the work is completed.

"It's really exciting that we might be able to have a Grade I listed church which is net zero for carbon emissions," said Andrew. "However, our primary purpose with the changes is to make sure that our church provides a space that will serve the whole community."

The proposed changes to St Thomas are currently going through the faculty permission process and once funding is approved and permission is granted, work on the church will take about six months. The Churches Conservation Trust has also suggested that the church looks at its entrance to make it more appealing and St Thomas is now exploring how they might do this whilst improving the utility of the community garden at the front of the church.

"We'll need to get some extra funding, but it would be amazing to incorporate some tiered seating at the front of the church where people often hang out," said Andrew. "It would be a place to sit in summer but could also be used for outdoor worship and community music and theatre performances, hopefully becoming a great space for arts and culture which everyone can enjoy!"

Overall, the national Church's Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board agreed in principle to an estimated investment of £6.8 million to support the renewal of seven churches in Dudley and Redditch. This forms phase 1 of our plan to ensure that each major area of population has at least one larger, healthy and sustainable church by 2030 – one with at least 150 people attending in an average week. Future phases of this plan will hopefully create similar congregations in Bromsgrove and Kidderminster.

For more information

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