

Shayne Ardron:

*Q: Please can you let us know how the work on the Minster Communities is developing and what kind of conversations we can be having in our parishes to help us prepare for it? Also what prayers would you be encouraging us to say?*

We are now well underway with the first group of churches piloting the process to form a Minster Community. Churches from 6 benefices around the Launde area were invited into this process and all have chosen to take part. Some initial meetings have been held, with representation from parish churches, fresh expressions of church and schools. People from each local church are undertaking some initial work, using a newly developed resource called a "Conversation Prompt". This enables us (local church leaders and wider church communities, alongside diocesan volunteers and officers) to build up a picture of ourselves that is honest and grounded in reality. As we build up this picture we will learn alongside our neighbouring churches. As we learn from each other we will begin to develop an identity as a Minster Community, and will be able to engage in conversations for our next steps. These will include conversations about our future mission including the 3 Key Questions and Diocesan Priorities, and consideration of our assets – people, buildings and finance. The process of forming as a Minster Community, like the whole of Shaped By God Together, is one of shared discernment.

A group of churches around the Coalville area has been invited to be part of piloting the process as we form a second Minster Community. These churches are still within the period of time during which we are asking them to respond to this invitation. In both instances, neighbouring parishes have received letters to inform them of Minster Communities beginning to form "on their doorstep", with an open invitation to observe that process if they would find that helpful in their own discernment. These parishes have been encouraged to share this with their wider benefices and respond either as a parish or benefice, as is helpful and appropriate for them.

We are encouraging all other churches to engage with the [Discussion Starter](#) sent out to PCCs in February. The biggest thing we have learnt so far in the pilots is that the preparation, before beginning to think about forming a Minster Community, is really important and takes much longer than you might think! The more honestly and deeply any church understands itself, its calling and mission, and its relationships (with local community, with other churches, and more widely), the better prepared the church will be for beginning to form a Minster Community when the time comes. Further to this, we encourage churches to consider how they can develop partnerships to support each other in mission and ministry – this might build on what's already happening or be in response to local opportunities. However, we strongly encourage churches and leaders to resist the temptation to jump forwards into structural conversations and pre-empt the diocesan process for forming Minster Communities. We must all remember, our diocesan vision is not Minster Communities, our diocesan vision is the Kingdom of God. We will continue to discern together how our diocesan framework of Minster Communities will best support all our churches as we respond to our three key questions of growing in number and depth of discipleship and in loving service of the world.

Prayer pointers:

For all the clergy and lay leaders in churches engaged in forming Minster Communities and the volunteers and staff supporting and facilitating the process; particularly for wisdom and

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attentiveness in discernment, courage and creativity in imagining the future, humility and generosity in developing relationships.

*Claire Bampton, Diocesan Programme Manager*