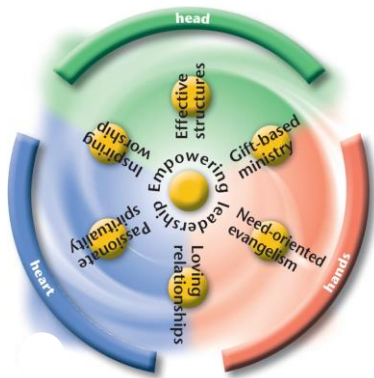


HEALTHY CHURCHES, OUR FRIDAY PRAYER THEME FOR NOVEMBER

Promoting the essential qualities of church health



For over a decade, the Diocese of Coventry has been encouraging churches to engage with **Natural Church Development (NCD)**. In particular, the **eight essential qualities** of healthy churches have been promoted as a means of helping them to flourish.

The national Church of England is also promoting “healthy churches” from a **safeguarding** perspective. Our churches must be safe and welcoming places for all – this is an imperative of the Christian gospel.

We are also developing a strategy for the **long-term sustainability of our church buildings**.



During 2023 we will:

- Re-launch our support for healthy churches – based on the principles of NCD – within the context of our **diocesan growth strategy**.
- Develop a plan for the ongoing legacy of the Serving Christ project.
- Implement a diocesan Safeguarding Action Plan in response to **Past Cases Review 2**.
- Introduce a system to assess the long-term sustainability of our church buildings. This will inform a church building strategy in 2024.



Safeguarding Sunday is an annual event planned by the Christian safeguarding charity 31:8, this year it is on **Sunday 19th November**. The aim of safeguarding Sunday is to give churches the opportunity to talk about safeguarding in a positive way and to help our wider congregations to understand the importance of good safeguarding culture and practice. We would encourage all churches to sign up to download the resources. The resources include suggestions of what to do if you have anything from 10 minutes to a whole service available. If the 19th November doesn't work for your church you are also welcome to pick a different date that is convenient for you. You can sign up to receive the resources from 31:8 here – <https://thirtyoneeight.org/get-involved/safeguarding-sunday/>

[Safeguarding e-manual | The Church of England](#)

This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts, and grows; though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain – first the stalk, then the head, and then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

Mark 4.26-29

AD = Area Dean; C = Clergy; IR = Interregnum

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	HEALTHY CHURCH Clive Hicks – Diocesan Enabler	DEVELOPMENT Fr Gary Ecclestone – Oswestry churches enabler	1 8EQs Empowering Leadership	2 8EQs Loving Relationships	3 8EQs Holistic Small Groups	4 Bishop Christopher Leaving Service (Cathedral)
5 ALL SAINTS DAY SHIPSTON DEANERY AD Sarah Edmonds Maguire	6 Ilmington, Stretton-on- Fosse, Preston-on-Stour,	7 Whitchurch, Tredington & Darlingscott C – Richard Cooke	8 Ilmington Primary H – Paul Crouch	9 Bishop’s Core Staff Team (all day)	10 8EQs Inspiring Worship Services	11 Historic churches and church halls across the Diocese
12 REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY	13 South Warwickshire Seven Group C – Ben Dyson	14 Claire Strachan, work on church building strategy	15 Together for Change (TfC)	16 Sarah Price and the Diocesan Safeguarding Team	17 8EQs Passionate Spirituality	18 Diocesan Synod
19 2 nd BEFORE ADVENT SAFEGUARDING SUNDAY	20 Shipston-on-Stour, Tidmington, Honington & Idlicote C – Sarah Edmonds Maguire	21 Stourdene Group Assoc C – Nicki Chatterton	22 Cathedral Finance Cttee	23 Newbold & Tredington Primary H - Sam Welsby	24 8EQs Needs Oriented Outreach/Evangelism	25 Ettington Primary H – David Johnson
26 CHRIST THE KING Brailes, Tysoe and nearby parishes Group C - George Heighton	27 Tysoe Primary H – Paige Neale	28 Cathedral Chapter	29 Brailes Primary EH – Christian Hilton	30 Diocesan Environment Group; Race Equality Strategy Group	8EQs Effective Structures	Mission Hubs and Urban Plants across the Diocese
		SHIPSTON DEANERY Clergy with PTO – Sarah Bourne, Andrew Dow,	Glyn Evans, Michael Harris		8EQs Gift based Ministry	Schools included are all Church of England schools. Other schools may be mentioned.

PRAYER DIARY



Tidmington

Coming up – the Theme for the final month of 2023 is Advent/Christmas (December). Do consider sending me your prayer suggestions, and any other jottings. It will be published on 20 November.

BEING HEALTHY CHURCH
Christian Schwarz wrote in 2015 that “parishes that have been involved with Natural Church Development have revitalized some of the best traditions of Anglicanism in a way that is relevant for the people they strive to reach.”

SPECIFIC DAYS IN NOVEMBER 2023

5 – Shipston Deanery Area Dean, Sarah Edmonds; Lay Chair, David Rake - We give thanks for the donations from our schools for our Foodbank, based in St. Edmund's Church, which supports those in need in all our villages. We also give thanks for the Eco Church and Village initiatives which are developing in our deanery. For Rev. Sarah Edmonds, our Area Dean, who is currently on sabbatical; may she return refreshed and invigorated to continue to cultivate love that is so freely shared.

6 – The Ilmington Downs and Stour Valley churches: Ilmington, Stretton-on-Fosse, Preston-on-Stour, Whitchurch, Tredington & Darlingscott R(PTO) Ros Wakefield, C (PTO) Tim Seller To give thanks for: a sense of recovery after the shocks of the last few years, and the faithfulness of God. To pray for: growing links between the churches and increased community links in the villages, and the appointment of an associate minister in the next year.

8 - Ilmington CofE Primary School, Paul Crouch, headteacher, says, 'Something we would like to thank God for: For the hard-working staff who give so much to the children in our school. Something we would like prayer for: For the children and families who attend our school.'

13 – South Warwickshire Seven Group – Barcheston, Barton-on-the-Heath, Burmington, Cherington with Stourton, Long Compton, Whichford and Wolford R (PTO) - Clare Wells

20 – Shipston-on-Stour, Honington and Idlicote – C (Assoc) – Jill Tucker, C - Hannah Gregory, R - Alison Tomkinson Thankful for all the volunteers who do all the billions of little jobs that keep the place going. Pray for the volunteers and users of the Foodbank. The lack of donations is making this project vulnerable atm.

21 – Stourdene Group - C (Assistant) David Jessett

23 – Newbold & Tredington CofE Primary School, Sam Wellsby, headteacher writes, 'I would like thank God all the members of our school community and how everyone works together to create a happy and caring environment. I would like a prayer for all those children who are not able to access an education and have access to all the wonderful experiences that we take for granted.'

25 – Ettington CofE Primary School

26 – Brailes, Tysoe and nearby parishes Group – Brailes, Sutton-under-Brailes, Tysoe, Oxhill and Whatcote C (Associate) Heather Parbury; C (PTO) Jill Tucker; R – Jennie Rake We give thanks for our church schools in Brailes & Tysoe and for all their donations to Shipston Foodbank following their Harvest Festivals in our churches. We pray for all those who come to our service on All Souls Day to remember those who passed from this life to the next, and for all who are grieving the loss of a loved one.

27 – Tysoe CofE Primary School

29 – Brailles CofE Primary School

C = Clergy R = Reader H = Headteacher

Prayer for the Church Building Strategy across the Diocese

Claire Strachan writes, *“the Church of England nationally faces the challenge of keeping church buildings open and not overburdening the PCCs who care for them more than they are already. To make any difference at all, we need masses of funding”*. So that's the challenge.

- Pray for wisdom and guide us in our discussion as we continue to **develop our understanding and ideas** that will contribute to an effective church buildings strategy that will be of use and benefit for the whole Diocese.
- **Pray for the PCCs** who are struggling with the responsibility and pressure of caring for their church buildings, and help them to care for these magnificent places where God can be worshipped, praised and adored. **A new project focuses on finding innovative solutions to the volunteering crisis in churches – completion by February 2024.**
- **Pray for those PCCs where the future of the church building is uncertain**, and give them the peace and support they need to explore challenging and potential painful discussions as they move forward
- **Pray for those embarking on major building projects in their churches.** Direct and guide their plans, and give them the patience and strength to continue when the scale of the project seems so hard and overwhelming. Give those who advise on the plans wisdom that all may be done in accordance with your will.
- **A funding bid for a Diocesan-wide churchyard biodiversity project – focusing on being good stewards of God's creation.**



“Could this work help to make a difference to all these over-burdened churchwardens, and help our churches and their communities become more sustainable, and ensure that these wonderful historic buildings that we have, that have shaped our landscape really, are able to be enjoyed by future generations. I’m so passionate that these churches are the physical symbols of our Christian faith in the landscape. They are

often the most architecturally significant buildings in the local community that show the fantastic skills of generations of craftspeople. They have witnessed entire histories of the community in which they are placed played out through their doors for hundreds of years from major events to every day parish life - our spiritual and social memory are embedded in them, so I’m really keen that we continue to enable as many people as possible to experience them and marvel at them, and use them, like we’ve had the opportunity to do. We want to pass this legacy on!”

Dr. Claire Strachan

PRAYER JOTTINGS – NOVEMBER 2023

- Final extract from Tyler Staton's *'Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools – an invitation to the Wonder and Mystery of Prayer'* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2022) *Chapter 10 Rebellious Fidelity* (Unceasing Prayer), pp 187ff..

When it comes to the many days after (a) passionate encounter (the fidelity), we typically find those to be underwhelming and disenchanting.

The exhilaration of our mountaintop experiences wears thin after a while, and we find ourselves reluctantly dragging our feet along the narrow path behind Jesus, yawning all the way. But spiritual boredom isn't necessarily a sign that we're lapsing in prayer, in fact it often means we're maturing.

The real fight of faith comes on all the ordinary days after the climactic moment because of what we all know but are afraid to come right out and admit: fidelity is boring.

Prayer is about love – Henri Nouwen writes, "Prayer is the act by which we divest ourselves of all false belongings and become free to belong to God and God alone."

Teach us to pray – I hear Jesus say, '.... pray with the heart of a lover and the discipline of a monk.' Prayer needs a container, something like the fidelity of a marriage, a set of practices or rituals within which that love can grow, mature and blossom.

Pray like a monk – in the Hebrew tradition there has always been a daily prayer rhythm: pausing to pray three times a day. This is true of all the great spiritual traditions. The Didache details the morning, midday and evening prayers observed by Christians in the early church.

¹⁶ As for me, I call to God,
and the LORD saves me.

¹⁷ Evening, morning and noon
I cry out in distress,
and he hears my voice. **Psalm 55.16-17**

Daily Prayer Rhythm (pp. 204 ff) – **Morning – the Lord's Prayer**, allow these words to move you through a very personal conversation with God;
Midday – The Lost, we are recovering the Shepherd's heart, allowing God to break our hearts for what breaks his own, taking up our authority as intercessors. **Evening – Gratitude**. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!
Thank you God for 'overdoing it.'

As we conclude this focus on prayer, you may want to look at this App,

[Inner Room App - 24-7 Prayer](#) daily prayer rhythm app - Tyler Staton; 24/7 prayer.

Pray without ceasing

Rejoice always, **pray continually**, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5.16-18

- In Robert Warren's *'Developing Healthy Churches'* (Church House Publishing, 2012), he says the first mark of a healthy church is, **'being energised by faith.'**
 - He asks what connects and animates life, seeing spirituality as 'an expression of the hunger to discover meaning, purpose and an overarching vision of how to make sense of life.'*
 - Lectio Divina, Examen and the Liturgy of Discernment, in particular, if embedded in the culture and activities of the church, will ensure that its whole life will be permeated by the desire for God and for connection with the grace, goodness, guidance and disturbing presence of God. Moreover, people will draw on these disciplines in their own lives.*
 - What drove Jesus to pray was not duty, but delight in the Father's presence.*
- Back in 2015, Bishop Christopher wrote *'The missionary task is urgent. The challenge for Anglicanism is great. Our diocese, though blessed with wonderful people and visionary leadership over the decades, has been in slow but steady decline. We are determined to do all we can to reverse that trend. NCD (natural church development) is a gift from God, renewing our hope and giving us confidence that it can be done.'* All By Itself, NCD Media, 2015
- In our **prayers for healthy churches** – qualities, safeguarding and buildings – Andrew Root and Blair Bertrand challenge us not to be overcome by a fear of decline, *"Feeling the hot breath of decline, waiting seems to be a repulsive enemy. Yet, we have learned from other crises the church has faced in its history that the only way out is not to focus on the church but instead to return our attention to the God who acts"*. Rather than becoming more anxious and focused on perceived decline it is vital to live with a deeper understanding that God can *'never be made smooth and controllable.... God is wild The God who makes the church can never be caged or captured by the church. Our crisis is continual because God is God. Because God is God, we must wait.'* When Church Stops Working, Brazos, 2023.
- Each month **we focus on a different Deanery; this month it is Shipston Deanery**. *In December we will be praying Coventry East Deanery. I look forward to receiving updates from area deans and clergy, and anyone else with specific prayer requests.*

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