

# Transforming Communities

---

## **Purpose**

The Transforming Communities Department has been supporting churches as they engage with their local communities, that in obedience to God, they might discern the movement of God's Spirit in the world and express the love of Christ. Specifically, it has aimed to:

- 1) support churches as they engage with their local communities,
- 2) engage with statutory services and with the voluntary sector promoting the role of the church,
- 3) advise senior staff on matters of social justice and care,
- 4) network with national colleagues.

## **Structure and modus operandi**

Transforming Communities is a small department, with the Director (David Primrose) supported by a part-time Executive Assistant (Ruth Brooker). It has relied upon an extensive network of formal and informal relationships through which to address its responsibilities.

- The Diocesan Environmental Officer (John Polhill) serves in a voluntary capacity.
- The Diocesan Officer for Mission in the Economy (Bill Mash) works primarily as team leader for the Black Country Urban Industrial Mission.
- In Shrewsbury Episcopal Area, our part-time Dementia-Friendly Church officer (Sarah Thorpe) has been supported through Addition for Mission funding, working for Transforming Communities Together alongside colleagues in Staffordshire & Stoke (Edward Smith then Mike Bridgewater) and in the Black Country (Joy Dale).
- Our part-time 'For Richer, for Poorer' Church Partnerships worker (Ruth Clay) received Mission Development funding, this four-year post terminating in August 2017.
- Transforming Communities Together, our Joint Venture with the Church Urban Fund, receives external funding to employ a Near Neighbours Coordinator (Ruth Burgess) and a Transforming Communities Together Development Worker (James Henderson). Grant funding enables TCT to employ a co-ordinator (Evelyn Williams) for the Wolverhampton Poverty Truth Commission. Our Places of Welcome Enabler (Helen Titterton) is funded to serve across Staffordshire and Stoke, whilst her colleague, (Sue Ball) is employed by Thrive and serves Birmingham and the Black Country.

- The Department links with the Finance Department through the Parish Projects Support Officer (Fiona North) who has worked out of the same office.

The Director convenes the interdepartmental Diocesan Environmental Advisory Group. He chairs Transforming Communities Together, the joint venture between CUF and the diocese. He remains Diocesan Interfaith Officer. The Director chairs the Social Responsibility Network, authoring Visible Discipleship, and has been involved in the Saltley Trust's research, Christians in Practice. He is a director of Church Action on Poverty and of Street Associations. He has been part of diocesan Peer Reviews. He is the communities' lead on the Prime Minister's Dementia Champion Group. During 2017, he preached and led Sunday worship in fifty churches.

The Department has worked through the network of churches throughout the diocese committed to be part of the transformation of their communities. The key outcomes are thus delivered through local Christians, whose ministry the Department has sought to honour and support in several different ways as illustrated below. The Director's informal role in supporting prison chaplains has been taken on by the diocese's managing chaplain (Sarah Morris). Likewise having delivered another Mental Health bible study course in Colwich and the Enabling Church course in Shrewsbury, leadership in addressing issues of disability now rests with the Diocesan Enabling Church Adviser (Zoe Heming). The office sends out Justice Mail, with the Director, at the end of the year, becoming diocesan list manager. With colleagues from Mission (George Fisher) and from Vocations and Training (Lindsey Hall), ministry around funerals has been developing, with a particular focus on death confident congregations and lay funeral celebrants.

The Department celebrates the Christ-like mission and ministry of churches throughout the diocese engaged in faithfully serving their local communities. The Department continues to adopt an asset-based approach, helping parishes stretch beyond their current achievements. It is in embracing difference, and being open to shared vulnerability, that the power of God can be transformative. This is embedded in the local community, whilst being aware of the intergenerational and global perspectives. It recognises the changes which occur during transitional phases of life, expressing afresh the hope that is within us.

During the year, the Department's main themes changed from:

- Caring for God's Creation
- Sharing in Ministry with Older People
- Enabling People to Live Well with Disabilities
- Tackling Poverty and the Causes of Poverty

to:

- Environment
- Poverty

and

- Asylum-Seekers, Refugees and Migrant Workers

In conjunction with the Bishop's Lent Appeal, the department arranged for the production of thirteen [Stories of Welcome](#), (compiled by Charlotte Swan and Daniel Njuguna) narrating links between local churches and projects working with asylum-seekers and refugees. We facilitated the diocesan [Children's Society](#) 'Hat-te-bah' Conference on Young Refugees, along with the [Mothers Union](#) and [Home for Good](#).

With support from the diocesan communications department (Simon Jones), we produced seven videos about death, dying and funerals, with themes such as organ donation.

During 2017, the capacity to address the theme of poverty has been enhanced by the development of Transforming Communities Together (TCT). Through TCT, we have been enabled to engage further with the themes of asylum-seekers & refugees & migrant-workers, and homelessness.

In addressing these objectives, the Department has sought to ensure that its ministry expresses the core values of being inclusive, missional, relational and sustainable. We see the triune God transforming church and community across the diocese. The Father values all that gives life. The Son seeks companions with whom to share in ministry. The Spirit releases potential in every situation.

## **Activities**

The work of transforming communities has been based in churches across the diocese. The following examples provide the perspective of colleagues working to support local ministry.

### **Mothers' Union**

**Sue Egerton:** During 2017 we launched a new initiative, providing a bag of goodies for teenage mums and their babies, (MUM BAGS) we are working closely with the health care specialists, midwives and doctors so that we can access those who need our support. Lichfield Diocese has some of the areas of the highest cases of teenage pregnancy in the country - MU's tag line is 'Christian care for families' and we all

know that families come in all shapes and sizes and it's all our jobs as Christians to care for everyone.

We are also working on an initiative launched by Central Mothers' Union called MULOA - Mothers' Union Listens Observes Acts. The aim of this is to find out what is happening in parishes all over this country (and abroad); we will be asking a percentage of our branches here in Lichfield Diocese what they do to support their local community, how and where they do it and what results they have seen. Transforming Communities Together has offered to work alongside us on this. The information we gather, along with TCT's knowledge of parishes who do not have Mothers' Union, will enable us to put together a profile of the work in the diocese that we hope to be able to share with lay and clergy alike.

### Mission in the Economy

**Bill Mash:** Chaplaincy, in its many aspects, is a growth area of the Church's life. The lay and ordained people in chaplaincy roles enable the church to have an extensive social reach and engagement with civil society. Once thought of as marginal to the mission and ministry of the church, it is encouraging that it has been recognised as one of the Diocesan Mission Projects. In pursuit of this, the Black Country Urban Industrial Mission (BCUIM), with its aim of "Connecting Church and the Economy", aims to resource the mission of local churches by selecting, training, introducing, connecting and supporting volunteer chaplains to visit workplaces in their areas. An increasing number of chaplains, from a wide range of churches, are associated with us. The ministry of chaplains affirms God's interest in, and sovereignty over, the whole of life. So we encourage Christians to see their Monday – Saturday lives as integral to their Christian discipleship, and welcome the General Synod Report "Setting God's People Free" (GS2056), which was presented to Diocesan Synod during the year. Many people's lives are limited by debt, and a team member continues to provide budget training for church groups to share with those who need that help.

### Interfaith

During 2017, David Primrose has served as Diocesan Interfaith Officer, Andy Smith as the Bishop of Shrewsbury's Interfaith Adviser, Allan Townsend as Bishop of Stafford's Interfaith Advisor, and Ray Gaston as Wolverhampton Episcopal Area's Interfaith Enabler and as Adviser to the Bishops of Wolverhampton and Lichfield. Andrew

Wickens is working with other faith communities and the City Council in Stoke-on-Trent. Details of Interfaith work in the Wolverhampton Episcopal Area follow.

**Ray Gaston:** 'My focus has been on developing Christian discipleship in a multi faith world and encouraging new forms of inter faith engagement particularly amongst children and young people. We are all called to be involved in the multifaith reality of our contemporary world. My role is not to be 'the specialist' but rather as my title suggests encouraging all Christians to engage positively and with theological integrity our consciously multi faith world.' To this end the last year has seen Ray involved in working with others on several projects. Firstly, the Christian Muslim Partnership initiative launched in March 2017 - a few Churches and Mosques have entered into twinning arrangements. Christians from Evangelical, Anglo Catholic and Liberal traditions have all become involved. Secondly, piloting a 3-day training course on inter faith engagement for Christians. The three days focus on different aspects of inter faith engagement for Christians.

- Approaching explores our theological underpinning and our personal experience – how does this influence our engagement,
- Engaging offers opportunities for dialogue and encounter with other faiths traditions,
- Reflecting focusses upon how our experience of inter faith encounter impacts upon our own Christian self understanding.

The highlight of the year has been the work he has been doing with Primary Schools. 'I was asked by Interfaith Wolverhampton to take over the organising of their annual Prayers for Peace service. We moved the event to interfaith week, changed the venue and worked with three faith schools Christian, Muslim and Sikh. The children were involved in dialogue workshops in the autumn term and together presented their work at the renamed 'Peace for All' event at Molineux Stadium in Inter faith week where they outlined their visions for the city in 2020.' I have also been involved in developing 'The Bishop and the Imam' assemblies with Bishop Clive and Imam Rashid Raja for local schools that featured in the Express and Star with a positive Editorial comment. This has caught the imagination of Primary Schools in the area with assemblies booked in until the end of the summer term 2018.

### [Diocesan Environmental Advisory Group](#)

The Diocesan Environmental Advisory Group brings the Diocesan Environmental Officer (John Polhill) together with representatives from DAC (Kristina Williamson), Finance Department (Fiona North), parish ministry (Richard Clarkson) and Transforming Communities (David Primrose).

In the previous year, we had experimented with ways to monitor and analyse church heating systems and established that recording air temperature would be sufficient to assess the effectiveness of the system and make recommendations for approval where appropriate. The offer was taken up by 70 churches leading to an intensive programme of distributing logging equipment (and getting it back!), extracting the data, and preparing reports. Winter held out long enough to complete the observations. There were a number of recurring themes in the reports, most commonly that the effectiveness of the existing systems could be improved by the use of better controls and/or relatively low cost adaptations. Inspired by this work, there has been a study of the heating in Lambeth Palace and now funding is being sought to consolidate this into a national programme with a number of diocese-level projects.

Clergy in training are often advised to avoid churches with large churchyards, and yet these often have the potential to be a means of connecting with members of the local community beyond the regular church members. The Diocese Churchyard Award Scheme, approaching its 25<sup>th</sup> year, is a very clear way to recognise the astonishing degree of care and commitment among people who look after churchyards and gardens across the diocese. We have been building on this by offering day events called "Love your churchyard" in four different locations and offering part-funded preparation of Churchyard Management Plans by the national charity Caring for God's Acre. The plans help churches establish defined zones with specific management regimes, and to engage District Councils and members of the local community with the maintenance work in a planned way. In 2018 we plan to offer training in the preparation of Management Plans so that churches can also do this work themselves.

During 2016, Leeds Diocese initiated a scheme for offering parishes energy supply from renewable sources ("Green Energy") using a firm of energy consultants to get supply quotations for individual parishes with a bulk purchase discount. The quotations were financially attractive and the churches that decided to accept them made significant financial savings on the cost of energy. This is also a way to help meet the C of E national commitment to CO2 reduction. Three other dioceses

adopted this programme in early 2017 and the scheme is being trialled in Lichfield Archdeaconry.

### **For Richer, for Poorer- transformative church partnerships**

**David Primrose:** Over the last four years, our Church Partnership Officer (Ruth Clay) has encouraged churches ministering in differing contexts within the diocese, to enter into partnerships of mutual respect and learning. Our project began as part of Church Action on Poverty's Close the Gap campaign and connected with other projects across the country adopting similar approaches. Contact was made with every deanery, with 34 parishes being actively engaged, and a further 27 showing an interest. The following principles have underpinned this ministry

- Humble mutuality
- Valuing all types of churches
- Informal structure
- Giving time to explore
- 'Better together'
- Reflective journeying

Participating parishes are now responsible for taking forward their partnerships in whatever format suits them best.

### **Transforming Communities Together (TCT)**

**David Primrose:** TCT is a Joint Venture with the Church Urban Fund seeking to encourage and support the ministry of churches and local organisations in communities who are vulnerable to or experiencing aspects of poverty. Its core development work is funded directly by the Church Urban Fund on a reducing scale, with all other streams of work receiving independent funding. In the last three years, it has also enabled 27 groups to access Together Grants totalling £89,800.

During 2017, we expanded our team, using external funding and partnerships to include one Places of Welcome worker for the Black Country and one for Staffordshire and Stoke. We have also sourced funding, in partnership with Love Black Country, to have a dedicated Families Champions Coordinator, working with 17 churches across the Black Country four national/local charities who all support families and want to work with churches. This may form a future national model. During 2017, TCT has continued to support End Hunger Stafford, in conjunction with the local MP.



## Development Work

**James Henderson:** Over the last year, our work has continued to grow. The development work links together areas of common concern with churches, communities, and organisations in the voluntary and statutory sector. Out of these links, distinct projects emerge for which we seek dedicated funding. We adopt an asset-based approach, working with those impacted by challenges such as mental health, homelessness, modern day slavery, food poverty and asylum.

Homelessness sadly continues to grow across the Black Country and beyond, so we partnered with [Housing Justice](#) to run a large Black Country wide conference, bringing together churches of all denominations, other faith groups, secular charities and councils to explore solutions and ways of working together better. The keynote speaker was the newly elected West Midlands Mayor, Andy Street. This has since led to a strengthening of existing relationships and new relationships with partners like Homeless Link and the YMCA. Churches have been very involved in the extended Walsall and Wolverhampton Night Shelters, as well as being part of an online prayer group coordinated by TCT. TCT is also coordinating early work in Walsall to bring together people from different faiths and cultures who are supporting the homeless.

Homelessness overlaps with our work on Modern Slavery, which has grown throughout 2017. We are now Deputy Chair of the multi-disciplinary Wolverhampton Anti-Slavery Partnership. We have also been working closely with the new Church of England Modern Slavery body – The [Clewer Initiative](#), helping them look at community based approaches. We are building links with colleagues in Derby and Southwell & Nottingham Dioceses to share good practice.

## [Black Country Near Neighbours](#)

**Ruth Burgess:** Near Neighbours has given over 30 Small Grants to projects in the Black Country this year including many first time applications. In line with our particular areas of focus we also had a high percentage of projects aiming to work with vulnerable women and new communities. Around 50 people came together in April to celebrate the positive difference Near Neighbours is making in the Black Country. A range of local projects were asked to share the work they had done funded by Near Neighbours at the event at Bilston People's Centre. Friendship and a greater understanding was the common theme of the day. Haroon Ravat from Walsall Council shared how working with local faith groups and Near Neighbours has



improved the provision for the homeless in Walsall. "It is thanks to the efforts of faith groups that the homeless in Walsall can access a proper hot meal," he said. The Bishop of Lichfield, a trustee of Near Neighbours since 2011, closed the event with his own reflections on the importance of Interfaith work.

Near Neighbours funded 5 Great Get Together events in the Black Country. This included an event at Sandwell Valley Country Park attended by over 100 people from all faiths and walks of life. The event had a craft focus with a plant pot decorating competition and badge making. Speakers included Tom Watson MP and deputy leader of Sandwell Council Syeda Khatoon. Other Great Get Togethers in the area included a street party in Wolverhampton and a party in the park in Dudley.

The Real People, Honest Talk was piloted in the Black Country between September and December 2017. 'Real People, Honest Talk' is a new strand of work for Near Neighbours that aims to bring people together to engage in conversation, and subsequent action, around difficult and sensitive topics of concern in a locality. The idea is to create a safe and open space where everyday people, not just 'community leaders' can be open and honest about their anxieties and aspirations. It is hoped that these conversations and exchanges will help to diffuse some of the misunderstandings that can do so much damage in local communities. 15 groups met in the Black Country (with each group meeting three times). They will be coming together again for the Big Conversation on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

For Interfaith Week this year 13 women from the Women First Interfaith Group went on a bus tour of faith buildings in Sandwell. The group visited a Church, Mosque, Mandir and Gurdwara. Women from Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Sikh and no faith backgrounds took part.

### **Wolverhampton Poverty Truth Commission**

**Evelyn Williams:** TCT is the lead agency in Wolverhampton Poverty Truth (WPT), a national movement of five active Truth Commissions, working closely with Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Barrow Cadbury Trust. WPT is comprised of eight 'Grassroots Voices' who have a lived experience of poverty and who want to reduce inequality in the city. They are working with fourteen 'City Shapers' comprised of civic and business leaders, people who make decisions about how Wolverhampton is run. Our Grassroots Voices and City Shapers have been meeting every 6 weeks following our launch on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2017. They have built relationships and together

they have identified three priorities which will help make a difference to people living in poverty within the priority areas. These are

- Mental Health,
- Support Networks
- Housing.

The Mental Health priority will focus on how employers can help to prevent the downward spiral of mental health in the workplace. Those employers, who are willing to support members of staff affected by mental health issues, will sign up to an Employer's pledge.

The Support Network priority will be looking at ways of making it easier for people in poverty to access services through Wolverhampton Information Network where WPT will extend the accessibility of the Council's Website.

The Housing priority is looking at priority housing for homeless young people by way of utilising Co-operative housing.

Furthermore, plans are in progress to address the issue of attitudes towards people in poverty within places such as Job Centres. The commission will continue until 14<sup>th</sup> June 2018 at an event that will showcase the progress made by Wolverhampton Poverty Truth, with subsequent work to and consolidate implementation and disseminate learning.

### **Places of Welcome**

The Places of Welcome movement has continued to develop in the diocese and nationally, creating spaces where people feel safe to connect, belong, and contribute. There are now approximately 200 Places of Welcome in England and Wales, including in 65 our diocese: 18 in Walsall, 15 in Wolverhampton, 19 in Sandwell, 12 in Staffordshire and 1 in Stoke-on-Trent. Most of these are in our Anglican Churches, and there are growing numbers hosted by other Christian denominations as well as faith and community groups, such as Community Centres, Libraries, mosques and temples.

**Sue Ball** has continued to co-ordinate the developments across Birmingham and the Black Country. With grants and crowdfunding, **Helen Titterton** was appointed in October as Places of Welcome Enabler to work across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. **James Henderson** has support the developments of the national network in

conjunction with Joint Ventures across the Country. On social media, there are over 800 followers on Twitter and 150 UK Facebook followers. A closer co-operation with the Church Urban Fund and Near Neighbours will see the national and local Places of Welcome networks continue to strengthen and grow into the future.

### **Cash Smart: Credit Savvy**

**James Henderson:** Cash Smart:Credit Savvy has been another major piece of work. CUF and TCT, along with three other Joint Ventures have been doing the data collection phase for the Government's Money Advice Service "What Works Fund". This has included travelling to support colleagues in Bassetlaw, Black Country, Hinkley, London, Middlesbrough and Stoke-on-Trent.

### **UCSavvy**

**James Henderson:** UCSavvy is a new initiative from TCT and the Just Finance Foundation (which formed from Archbishop Justin's taskforce on affordable credit). We have listened to churches and organisations about their worries about the complexity of the Universal Credit (UC) application process. In response, we have quickly developed this short course, to get help to people as UC fully rolls out. It can be delivered in under an hour, either to claimants (the grassroots version) or to those who support them in churches, drop-ins and other charities working with people on benefits (the organisation version). It is designed to help people understand and negotiate some of the complexities of Universal Credit. This is so far being used by over 30 churches and organisations nationally.

### **Sandwell Churches Link (SCL)**

**Laura Nott:** 2017 has been a year of consolidation and growth for SCL. Our conference in February launched the Jubilee Food Network, bringing together people and initiatives which move beyond food charity and towards food sovereignty. We launched our Jubilee Money network in May, offering free Financial Capability training to church volunteers in all of Sandwell's six towns this year. We now have local church networks set up in Smethwick, Oldbury, Rowley Regis, West Bromwich and Wednesbury, all of whom are meeting and praying together regularly.

Our focus for 2018 is developing a Food Power alliance to create a food poverty action plan, and exploring how churches can best respond to homelessness. West

Midlands Combined Authority Mayor, Andy Street, is the keynote speaker at our conference on March 15<sup>th</sup>.

## Dementia Friendly Churches

**Sarah Thorpe:** We have three Dementia Enablers working across the diocese – Sarah Thorpe in north Shropshire, Mike Bridgewater in Stoke/Staffordshire and Joy Dale in the Black Country (who has now moved to France, to be replaced by Su Parker). There are now three elements to our support for churches as they become more dementia-friendly churches at the heart of dementia-friendly communities.

- Embarking on initial engagement as dementia-friendly churches: We lead Dementia Friends Sunday services to increase understanding of dementia among the whole church family: across the Diocese, more than 60 such services have created well over 2,000 Dementia Friends. Our four-session “Dementia-Friendly Churches” course is open to anyone who wants to go deeper: we have run over 20 courses with over 400 participants and a participant recently described the course as “Enlightening. Inspiring. Challenging. Moving. Cathartic.” Further, we support churches in taking the next steps they identify as appropriate to their local community, for example volunteering in a local group, running one-off events, hosting a group, offering dementia-friendly worship, putting on an event for Dementia Awareness Week or participating in the local Dementia Action Alliance.
- Embedding dementia-friendly church at the heart of the church’s ministry. The Diocese of Lichfield has been recognised as a dementia-friendly community by the Alzheimer’s Society in 2017. As such, we can award a “Dementia-Friendly Churches Certificate” to churches which sign up for three action points in the year ahead, entitling them to use the nationally-recognised “Working to become dementia friendly” logo. We have also devised a “Dementia Coordinator” role, which allows local churches to name and publicise someone who will have a conversation about dementia and memory loss, pray for people affected by dementia and signpost people on to other local services. We are also supporting churches by offering a bi-monthly “Dementia-Friendly Churches” newsletter, local Network meetings every six months, electronic resources and an annual Diocesan training day, which focused on “Dementia-Friendly Worship” in 2017.
- Extending the church’s connections, working with local and national partners and accessing a wide range of resources. We work with local Dementia Action Alliances and other charities providing services to people affected by dementia, such as the Alzheimer’s Society, Age UK and Approach.

We are also working with other dioceses and sharing our material: Sarah Thorpe has spoken at diocesan conferences in Llangollen and Cardiff, and David Primrose has helped organise the annual day conference on “Dementia-Friendly Churches” for all Church of England Dioceses, as well as chairing the Prime Minister’s Champion Group’s “Communities” Thematic Group and its “Faith in Dementia” Task & Finish Group. Additionally, we are

working with Staffordshire University to evaluate the impact of our dementia-friendly churches work. We also encourage people to make Memory Boxes. And we share stories through our own blog posts and by contributing to the national Church of England and Alzheimer's Society blogs. Finally we are glad to signpost people on to a whole host of other helpful resources which are available.

## **Transforming Talk**

Transforming Talk is a confidential subsidised service, supporting ministers through One to One conversations around managing transitions, problem solving, redirecting energy, focus on vision, clarify thinking and put thinking into practice. The minister chooses the focus for an intentional conversation that works towards bringing about tangible change. Twelve people accessed this service.

## **Looking Ahead**

During the coming year, the team for transforming communities will work closely with colleagues in the Discipleship, Vocations and Evangelism Department. Their co-location to new office premises in Lichfield will enable staff to spend more time together, and facilitate greater cooperation on initiatives such as Chad Living, promoting ethical lifestyles.

## **Revd Dr David Primrose**

Director for Transforming Communities