

manna

From the Church of England Diocese of Bath and Wells ☩ May 2025

Talking growth

In 2024 Bishop Michael issued a challenge to all churches to grow church by one adult and one child. Not much of a challenge at first glance you may think, but he also added the caveat 'net' to the challenge.

In order to meet the challenge churches are being asked to grow by one adult and one child in total, taking into account any reduction in congregation numbers over the year.

At a recent Deanery Synod, Area Dean of Midsomer Norton, Matthew Street, raised the challenge with attendees.



Bubble Church at Peasedown St John: a service for babies, toddlers, and young families.

Commenting on the resulting discussions, Matthew said, "They were asked to discuss in small groups, made up of people from across the deanery, to consider how they could meet the challenge.

"Vibrant discussions took place for the full twenty minutes allocated,

and it almost seemed a shame to bring it to an end.

"It was wonderful, however, to then hear the fruits of those discussions and the many and varied ideas that people shared in their groups.

From the importance of starting with prayer, and with what we already have, to pub church, family lunches, and joining in with what is already taking place."

All growth starts with prayer. Join us in praying for growth across our diocese. Download the diocesan prayer from the Bath and Wells website.

News in brief

Church clock restoration

Experts believe the clock at St Catherine's Church, Montacute, could date back to the 1400s, making it one of the oldest working timepieces in the country. It was recently removed for restoration under the watchful eye of 93-year-old Humphrey Hamlin, who had wound the clock for many years and restored it in 1987. A fundraising effort is now underway to support its repair and to create an exhibition space in the church.



Baptisms with a difference

Three baptisms took place in a local stream in the Benefice of Cheddar and Rodney Stoke. Associate Priest, Revd Thea Oliver baptised a mother and her two sons aged 11 and 12 in the stream that runs through the village of Rodney Stoke. Family and friends gathered on the banks of the river to join in prayer and celebration. Thea said, "It was a wonderfully moving service."



Doves of Peace

Residents in Keynsham have been invited to take part in the Peace Dove exhibition which will take place at St John's Church. Participants have written messages on card doves or have been knitting doves for the display outside the church. The Peace Dove exhibition invites everyone to reflect, remember, and look forward with hope. The community outreach exhibition is part of the wider national touring project 'Peace Doves' by the sculptor, Peter Walker.

Find out more on these and other news stories at bathandwells.org.uk/news

It's sowing time!

By Bishop Michael, Bishop of Bath and Wells

It's sowing time! My greenhouse is currently full of seedlings pushing their way towards the light. Soon all this new life will be big enough to be planted out into the garden. Peas and courgettes, dahlias and zinnias; all ready to grow, blossom and be fruitful. It's not only seedlings that grow. Churches do too! Just like all that's happening in my greenhouse, this doesn't happen by accident. Evidence shows that churches are most likely to grow when they plan and prepare for this to happen. Church growth is intentional. This issue of Manna contains stories about how churches in our diocese have planned for growth and of the fruit they're seeing as a result. There's no 'one size fits all'

for how this has happened. Just as in our gardens, what grows in one place won't necessarily thrive in another.

Important as planning and preparing may be, these things aren't the vital ingredient for growth. Growth comes when God is alive and at work within us and our churches. In his first letter to church he helped establish in Corinth, St Paul also uses a gardening metaphor to describe the growth he's seeing.

Paul says, 'I planted, Apollos [Paul's co-worker] watered, but God gave the growth.' (1 Cor 3:6).

Without God's input, any plans we have to grow our churches will be little more than strategy, our efforts like those of ants running

frantically to and fro. This is why our prayer for growth is essential. Prayer invites God to give us wisdom about what to do. It opens our treasure stores to resource the plans we want to put in place. It asks God to go before us to touch the hearts and minds of those we'd like to reach. It invites God to bless and prosper the work we do. So let's be inspired by the stories that show what can happen when we ask God to grow our churches, offering God our prayer, our faith, our effort and our trust. Let the sowing time begin!

Bishop Michael



Around the table

The Revd Esther Smith, Rector of Chilcompton, shares the story of Monday Supper Club, which sees a group of young parents meeting twice a month.

How did Supper Club begin?

After lockdown, we were hearing that there was a lot of loneliness in the village. We'd started a toddler group, but we wanted to reach slightly older children. I thought, Everyone has to eat—let's do a family meal.



Sharing support and friendship at the Monday Supper Club.

What's its purpose?

It's not about preaching at people. It's about offering generous hospitality in Jesus' name. We just want to build community and deepen relationships.

Who comes along?

People come as it suits them—usually twice a month.

We just offer the space and let it be what it needs to be. It's very informal. We started with simple food. The families bring puddings, and it's usually the dads who do the cooking.

Is it part of a church service?

No, there's no sermon or singing. But it's still a way of

being the church—by being present, welcoming, and real.

Has it grown the church?

In a broader sense, yes. The families have become a precious part of the church, even if they don't come on Sundays. Some have joined the electoral roll. A few are on the flower rota, and they help organise our Christmas lights.

What would you say to others thinking of doing something similar?

Be yourselves and be generous in Jesus' name. Don't try to be something you're not—just care about people, and let relationships grow.

Follow us on

 @BathWells  _BathWells  bathandwells