



# Living and telling the story of Jesus

Growing church  
Transforming communities

April 2024

 DIOCESE OF  
**Bath & Wells**  
Living and telling the story of Jesus

# Contents

- 2. Introduction
- 4. A growing church, transforming communities
- 6. Moving forward together
- 8. Here to support you
- 10. Witnessing and living out the gospel of Jesus
- 12. Being at the heart of our local communities
- 14. Offering our faith in new ways and places
- 16. Faith in action across our archdeaconries

## Introduction

**F**or me, the most important words spoken to me at the service of my consecration were ‘a bishop knows his people, and his people know him’.

I may not have met all of you yet, but it has been an utter privilege to have spent a great deal of time in my first eighteen months as your bishop visiting so many of our churches, chaplaincies and places of learning. It was particularly inspiring to attend the deanery gatherings that took place last year which saw Bishop Ruth and

me travel from Frome to Exmoor, Portishead to Yeovil and almost all stops in between.

I have been overawed by the commitment shown by so many people to witnessing and to living out the Gospel of Jesus. This is at the very heart of what we are called to be and do. I have been struck by the entrepreneurial and intentional ways in which we are seeking to build and be at the heart of our local communities, bringing love and care for our neighbours, and service to those in need.

At a time when we are facing some very real challenges, I wanted to share with you my



thoughts on how we need to work together to continue to bring our vision to life, but also to give you a snapshot of some of the stories that have inspired me. I share them with you in the hope that you are similarly inspired by the ways that every day across Bath and Wells we are using our God-given gifts to support our communities with love, with creativity and with passion.

I was asked at the deanery gatherings, ‘What’s next? What’s going to come out of this?’

What’s next is simple. We continue to be God’s people, living and telling the story of

Jesus so that we can grow our churches and transform our communities. Our vision for Bath and Wells is clear and unchanged – and is being lived out in our churches, our homes, our schools and workplaces every day.

As the stories I have shared illustrate, with God’s gracious love and support, this is something we can all play a part in achieving.

*+ Michael Bath & Wells.*

**Bishop Michael**



Coming together at [Greenhouse](#) to talk growing churches.

# A growing church, transforming communities

Bishop Michael shares our diocesan aim and thoughts on how we can bring our vision to life.

**O**ne of the things that attracted me most when I was asked to consider becoming the Bishop of Bath and Wells was the vision of this diocese: 'In response to God's love for us, we seek to be God's people, living and telling the story of Jesus.'

Since my arrival, it has been a privilege to see this vision lived out by our people in our parishes, schools and chaplaincies. The many conversations I have had as I have visited all parts of our diocese have helped to clarify our aim as a church in Bath and Wells - and that is to be a growing church, one that is transforming our communities. We want all people, and all creation, to know that they are loved by God and have a part to play in joining in God's life in our world.

As we look to the future, growth is the challenge we must all embrace if we are to be in a position to share God's love with our communities.

Listening to many different people across our diocese has helped us identify the ingredients of the growth we want to see:

- **Valuing and cherishing the people and resources we already have**
- **Developing new Christian worshipping communities**
- **Sharing in ministry and leadership**
- **Deepening and growing faith**



A flexible approach to [lay ministry training](#).



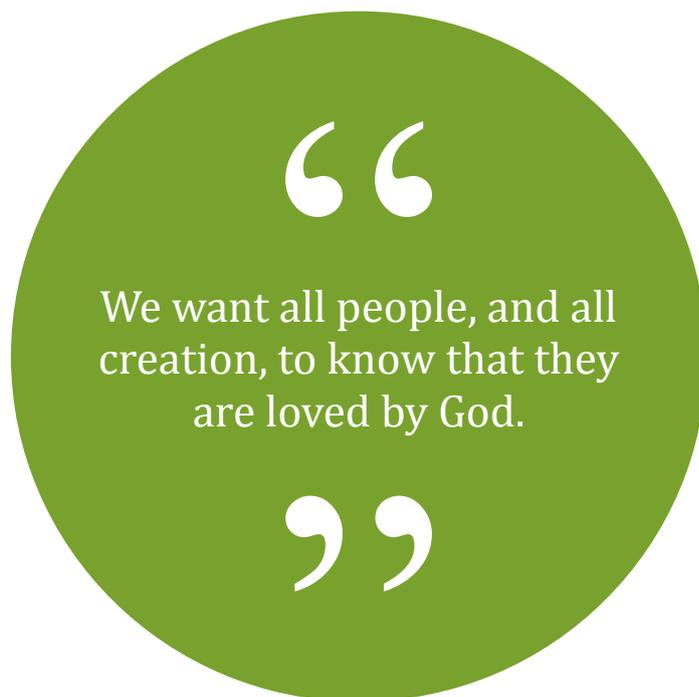
[Administrators coming together](#).

Local church members are the experts in their localities. I am asking every benefice to use your local knowledge and assets to identify your focus for missional action. One that, in prayer and under God, you think will grow your church and enhance your community. One that reaches out to people, not principally via improvement to your building or its facilities.

My very specific challenge is:

**‘Can you grow your church by at least one adult (net) and at least one child (net) during the next year?’**

This challenge is not one for you to undertake alone. There will be small grants available for those who need them to undertake missional projects and funding is being sought from the central church to provide additional assistance to targeted areas. Our support services continue to offer practical assistance to achieve our aim of ‘growing churches, transforming communities’. This includes our Greenhouse gatherings which bring together those who are already growing new church communities, our new lay ministry pathway which offers a more flexible approach to training for lay ministries, and the creation of administrator networks to support those carrying out this vital parish role.



And, of course, ours is a vision grounded in prayer so please join me as we pray for God’s continued love and guidance as we journey alongside one another. Together we will help more people in our communities to come to know that God loves them and wants to be with them, as we do.

**Bishop Michael**

# Moving forward together

Bishop Michael shares his reflections on some of the challenges we are facing as Church in Bath and Wells:

If the headlines are to be believed, what a time of doom and gloom it is for the Church. We've been battered by Covid, splintered by Living in Love and Faith and we're running out of members. But as ever, headlines can be deceptive. Yes, we are facing some challenges and it is important to name and address them. I am very proud of the way that we in Bath and Wells are facing ours.

The Covid pandemic did hit us hard, but there are signs of recovery and many of

you are continuing to utilise the skills and creativity forged during the pandemic to great effect in our churches today. I want to thank everyone who is enabling our churches to rebuild.

I also want to thank those of you who have joined in conversations we have held to discuss some heart-felt concerns, both at our gatherings to talk about how we can move forward together with the Prayers for Love and Faith, and those on the proposed Common Fund changes.

## Living in Love and Faith

For us here in Bath and Wells, I have suggested that the use of the Prayers of Love and Faith should be 'opt in' rather than 'opt out'. Given the differences that exist among us, I'm passionate that the decision to use or not use them must be subject first to the consciences of individual ministers and should also only be used in any church with the full backing of the PCC. We will be developing our own guidance in a number of areas, including for working with schools, the

handling of vocations, vacancies and encouragement to senior roles and continue to offer support to those who would welcome it.

To find out more about the use of Prayers of Love and Faith in Bath and Wells, including the support available to you in any discussions you have where you are go to [bathandwells.org.uk/llf](https://bathandwells.org.uk/llf)



Gathering together to discuss the Common Fund proposals

## Our Common Fund

Over 500 people took part in the first phase of our Common Fund consultation. The second phase of the consultation takes place in April before a decision on the final proposal is made by Diocesan Synod in July. I would urge you to continue to engage in these discussions. Even with the remedial actions we have taken, in recent years we have been running deficits year on year – in 2023 we again ended up £1.6m in the red before selling off our assets.

This is an ongoing reality with which we have to find ways to engage with so that our life together can be sustainable into the future. Please bring your full thought and consideration to how we address this challenge.

We may have different views on these issues, but people's willingness to engage

in discussions on these topics as we seek to find our way forward together is a real strength of our diocese. Despite heartfelt and passionately held positions of difference and real concerns, we have come together, talked in depth, listened carefully. This gives me great hope for the future as we move forward together as one church.

There are no easy answers to any of the challenges we face, but I do believe that together, with God's generous guidance, we can find solutions.

**Bishop Michael**

Find out more about the Common Fund consultations at [bathandwells.org.uk/common-fund](https://bathandwells.org.uk/common-fund)



# Here to support you

Diocesan Secretary, Jenny Hollingsworth, explains how support services is continually evolving to meet parish needs.

**O**ne of the joys of my job is that I frequently get to engage with clergy and lay leaders from across our diocese who are faithfully serving the people of our church and wider communities. One thing I always try to convey when I'm talking with anyone from our parishes is that we are your support services. We are here to serve you, just as you serve those in your communities.

Having been in post for just over a year, I can truly say that I feel privileged to lead a team of people who are passionate about doing just that: whether their role is focused on meeting the statutory requirements of our diocese or supporting those in our parishes, in our schools or in our chaplaincies. I am also very grateful for the many individuals who

have stepped forward to share their unique talents with us on a voluntary basis, which is simply invaluable.

The service we offer is continually evolving to meet your needs. Most recently we responded to concerns that it is difficult to get hold of the right person to help, by appointing a new receptionist. Tricia Lumley not only answers the phones and general emails but offers a warm welcome

Tricia Lumley, Front of House Administrator





Jacqui Carreira-White, DAC Secretary

to our visitors to Flourish House. Another area in which we have made a significant change in response to feedback from our parishes is the support arrangements for the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC), the body that advises parishes who want to carry out work on the fabric or furnishings of their church or churchyards. Jacqui Carreira-White has been appointed as full-time, in-house DAC Secretary to the diocesan Support Services team, based at Flourish House, Wells. Jacqui replaces the previous part time support provided by Sarah Williams, of Stone King Solicitors, at no extra cost.

The cost of Support Services is a subject on which I am used to be challenged, quite rightly. Support Services for a diocese is unique. In addition to the statutory roles it has to perform, the range of support it offers is hugely varied – from offering safeguarding guidance to arranging for a dripping tap in a rectory to be fixed; from guiding individuals on their journey to ordination, to offering support to our schools, HR guidance and much more besides. The shape of Support Services has changed a great deal over recent years and will continue to evolve to ensure we not only meet your needs as efficiently as possible, but in a way that is as cost-effective as possible.

It is vital that we have the right people, in the right roles, to provide the support you need to allow you to be in a position to do what you do best; ministering and serving the communities you serve, and growing God's Kingdom here in Bath and Wells.



**Jenny Hollingsworth**  
Diocesan Secretary

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We are here to serve you,  
just as you are here  
to serve those in your  
communities.

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## Some useful contacts

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**Find all the latest contact details and a downloadable key contacts list at**  
[bathandwells.org.uk/contact-us](http://bathandwells.org.uk/contact-us)

# Witnessing and living out the Gospel of Jesus

Across our diocese people are committed to witnessing and living out the Gospel of Jesus. It lies at the very heart of what we, as Christians, are called to be and do. Jesus fills us with His Holy Spirit, His love and His compassion so that we may reflect Him in all that we do.

## Reaching out to new people with good news of Jesus

A new Christian community for four self-supporting adults is being created in the redundant former vicarage of St Mary's Church in Frome. The group will live in the house for a year and work locally. As a community their shared life will be marked by a daily pattern of prayer, and a rule of life with shared values and approaches to missional living.

The Revd Liz Dudley, Vicar of St Mary's says, "It feels very much like God is at work here. Frome is open to the spiritual side of life, there is a common concern for those on the edge of society and we hope those who choose to live here will be able to connect with that aspect of life in the town."

Frome Signpost Pioneers, Elizabeth and Andrew Alden, who started the Giant's Garden project



in a forgotten part of the vicarage garden, are working with Liz. Andrew says, "We hope this community will contribute to God's work of regeneration in the churches in the town, increasing the missional impact of God's people."

There are also plans to create a continuous payer space. Open 24 hours a day, it will be a place of simplicity and beauty for use by everyone.



“

It feels very much like God is at work here. There was an opportunity to do something new: to build on the work that's already begun and to explore a new form of monasticism in the diocese.



A courts chaplain simply needs a love for Jesus and to be able to listen without fixing, accompany without judging and live and share the presence of God's love within the courts.



## Journeying with Jesus

Nearly 40 local Christians drawn from 19 different churches in the Taunton area provide chaplaincy in Taunton's Magistrates court centre.

The courts recognised the distinctive and inclusive presence of chaplains to listen, care for, pray, and meet people where they are in times of great need and accompany them on their journey.

Prebendary Adrian Prior-Sankey, Lead Chaplain with Taunton Team Chaplaincy, said of the role, "A courts chaplain simply needs a love for Jesus and be able to listen without fixing, accompany

without judging and live and share the presence of God's love within the courts."

The team have prayed with people and heard testimony of chaplaincy encounters making a real difference. A security guard at the court said, "You bring hope to this place."

There have been requests for chaplaincy to be extended to the Crown Court in Taunton. Adrian says, "We are one of many expressions of the Gospel of Jesus made by the Church in Taunton to our community. We offer training and support and underpin all that we do with prayer."

## Welcoming the stranger

In April 2022 the Holiday Inn Airport Hotel near Wrington was seconded for use as part of the Home Office dispersal scheme for refugees. When several of those from the Holiday Inn began to worship at All Saints the two communities slowly began to get to know one another.

The church and local community offered support to the refugees. The Revd David Gent, Rector

Wrington with Butcombe and Burrington, says, "We had the whole vision of the family of God. At Christmas, an Iranian man shared the reading of the visitation of the wise men in Farsi. It was a profoundly moving experience and a clear illustration of the love of God for everyone, whoever they are, wherever they come from. The experience has made us more ready to accept the stranger."

The Revd Andrew Hemming, Area Dean of Locking remembers an impromptu Easter gathering, "People shared their Easter meal with asylum seekers. The lunch ended after much singing, worship and laughter. It was tremendous, opening your heart and your home to strangers."

Deborah is one of those who supported the refugee community at the Holiday Inn. "I believe helping the stranger is one way of spreading God's love. If we act with kindness and compassion, we are an example of what it means to be a Christian."



# Being at the heart of our local communities

Across Bath and Wells, church communities have embarked on imaginative and entrepreneurial ways to build and be at the heart of their communities. They are intentional in the ways in which they seek to love and care for their neighbours and strive to provide a service to those who are in need.

## Sharing our faith

Before Covid there was a community shop with a café in the village of Baltonsborough. When it shut during the Covid pandemic the community hub of the village was lost. So, the church community stepped in and began a series of Common Good get-togethers.

Events range from soup lunches, to cream teas and Easter egg hunts. A spokesperson for the church said, “It’s going out to the community. It’s the mission of the church to do that and in some cases, that’s had a significant impact upon churchgoing. We’re preaching the Gospel by doing rather than talking.”

The team have also raised money through Common Good events to support the Lord’s Larder foodbank in Yeovil, the Salvation Army Citadel in Street and the Royal Agricultural Farming charity. There have been financial gifts as well as donations of food, clothes, and toys.

“It is very important from the point of view of the members of the PCC who started it because we want to grow our church. When people see it, they think the social work of the church is important and they want to join in with that.

“We’re told in the Gospel to spread the word of God and to share our faith and that’s what we are doing.”



It's all about being and doing things with the community.  
It's taking you outside the church building to go to the community, instead of asking everybody to come to you.

”

## Building community

A junior parkrun for 4 to 14-year-olds, designed to be positive, welcoming, and inclusive, has been set up by in Nailsea by Sarah Sanderson, Curate at Trendlewood Church. Sarah says of the 2k run, “It’s community building community. It offers people a reason to come together, encourage and support one another.”

Sarah, an avid runner herself, was motivated by the lack of families in the church and sought ways to connect with them “It’s all about being and doing things with the community. It’s taking you outside the church building to go to the community, instead of asking everybody to come to you.”

## Encountering God through song

Two children’s choirs in the Chew Valley have encouraged the children to sing and their parents and grandparents to connect with the church family.

Mini Melodies and Jubilee! sing at church services and school assemblies and have performed an Informal Sing in Wells Cathedral. Curate, Revd Fran



The team secured £4,000 from the local council to kickstart junior parkrun. Throughout the winter, around 30-40 children participate each week. The initiative extends beyond exercise, offering post-run opportunities for participants to gather, and share experiences.

While acknowledging the strict guidelines of parkrun, Sarah emphasises, “The interaction with families, being present in the community, representing a Christian presence and building meaningful relationships is a privilege. The positive impact is evident when we visit schools, where the children recognise us from parkrun. It is a brilliant connection between the church and the broader community.”

Smettem, says, “We found it difficult to make contact with families in the villages. We pursued outreach through music and it’s grown to the point where we are no longer feared as ‘all those church people’; the choir is very much seen as part of the community.”

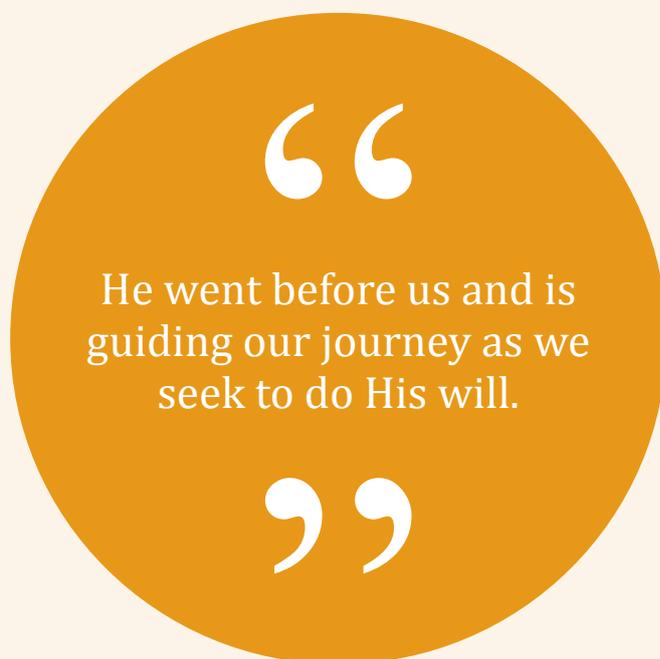
When the children sing in church, they are supported by family members, many of whom don’t normally come to church. Fran says, “Because we’ve met the children at school and given them fun music to sing, we’ve also had the opportunity to talk about the significance of music and worship, and we’ve prayed with them.”

The team would like to open the choirs up to children from other schools and are “thinking of ways to help the children going to senior school to keep singing and to keep feeling that they can be a part of church at a time when, going into secondary school, it is often a difficult place to be a Christian.”



# Offering our faith in new ways and places

Across our diocese we are going to where people are, not just expecting people to turn up to be with us. This is particularly so with respect to our work with children and families. We're seeing amazing work happening to offer worship, teaching and growth in discipleship that fits around families' needs.



## Creating community

Almost six years ago a transformative shift began in Goathurst, a small village of about 75 households of predominantly elderly professional retirees. The church community of St Edward, King and Martyr began to pray for young families to come to the village. Brenda Smith, Churchwarden said, "Gradually God answered our prayers. 14 new young families moved in. We reached out to welcome them. We delivered Easter eggs and created nativity activities aimed fostering a sense of community and our Curate Revd Nicki Bradford took charge of reigniting the children and young families' ministry, 'Kids @ Goathurst.'"

Weekly 'Stay and Play,' session were set up. Brenda commented, "It provided valuable one-to-one interactions. We have Bible story time, songs, a simple 'thank you' prayer and end with a goodbye song that reminds them that God loves them."

Expanding their outreach, the church offers a monthly 'Kids' Night' for older children. Brenda said, "This is just the beginning. As we have sought to build relationships and come alongside our children and young families, we can see other ways of developing our ministry."

"We firmly believe that God's hand has been on this initiative. He went before us and is guiding our journey as we seek to do His will."

## A space for people to see Jesus and find hope

At St John the Baptist Church, Chilcompton, a group started for young families began not at the Church but in the pub.

The Revd Steve Miles, Assistant Curate, was added to a WhatsApp group for young dads in the village, so he could join them for a drink at the pub “It struck me, the dads were connected, but the families weren’t. So, I asked myself, how could we connect with these families and build community?”

Steve started Monday Night Tea. The group gather in the church hall while the children play. Later they have a meal. Conversations happen, food is eaten, then with washing up done, everyone is off home to bed. A simple family teatime, that has transformed the lives of the young families in the community. 44 people come along, 39 of which had no contact or relationship with the church beforehand.

## Breaking down the barriers to faith

A group of young people between the ages of 18 and 30, regularly enjoy some competition and company at Locking Castle Church near Weston-super-Mare.

Revd Andy Pearce, Pastor at Locking Castle Church, helped set up the board games group, “It’s good banter. It’s an opportunity to get to know each other. We pray for each other or things going on, but what’s really important is the way it is building community with this age group.”

The group regularly meet in church, but if there are other activities happening they will join in. It’s this informality which helps create a space for conversations around faith. Andy says, “There’s an element of healthy competition, but that’s also an easy way to interact without having to worry about what you need to say. We do speak about spiritual things and questions do lead to conversations about faith. The conversations happen naturally whilst we are playing.”

As the Church we need to create space for people to come to a place of encounter, an environment that they can call home, to sometimes count the cost ourselves, so that people can see Jesus and find hope.

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Steve says he has wrestled with the question, “Do they need to transfer to Sunday services? Some have but they do not need to, for God is not just bound to Sundays, Monday nights are their service, their time to gather and be where the spirit leads.”

As the group has continued to grow, stories of hope and help have come forward and people have seen the presence of God move within their lives, just simply from gathering to eat together.



Andy believes doing something that works specifically for this age group helps break down barriers. He says when people feel safe, they’re more relaxed. “Once you take the pressure away it’s easy to build relationships and connect to this young adult community. It’s about intentionally making a space for it to happen.”

# Faith in action

We can't include all the wonderful stories that illustrate the incredible richness of our diversity across all our deaneries, but here is a flavour...



## Taunton Archdeaconry



### **Caring for God's earth:**

It was a commitment to take better care of God's creation which led St James's Church in Taunton to 'rewild' part of the churchyard. The transformation involved a deliberate and strategic shift to embracing a wilder, more natural landscape, encouraging wildlife and plants to flourish. It has also led to closer relationships with the school and local community who also help take care of the space.

### **Tackling food waste:**

With support from the environmental organization Hubbub UK, St. George's Church in Wilton opened a Community Fridge. Their goal is to tackle the problem of food waste by creating a space for local residents and businesses to leave surplus food, which can then be freely taken by those who need it.



### **Taking the church out to the people:**

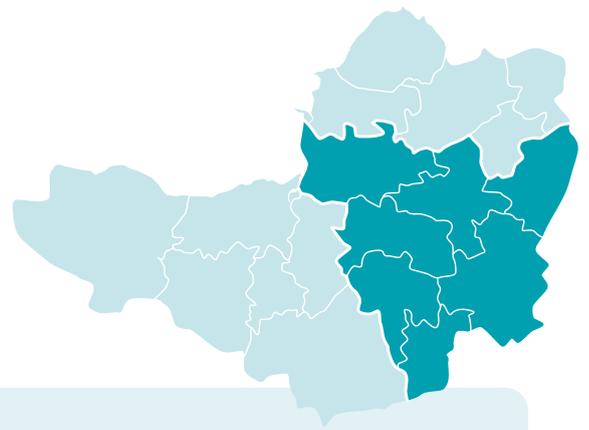
After a Warm Space was set up in Ashill village hall, to provide a place for local people to come during the cold winter months, the attendance grew steadily from six to nine, then eighteen and eventually twenty-seven. Churchwarden Brenda Pyle, says, "Rather than just being seen as church people, we are taking church out to the people."



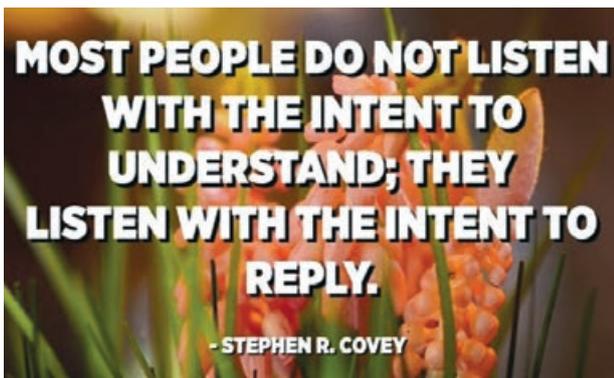
### **Lay Ministry:**

When the then rector of Quantock Towers benefice was looking to retirement, he asked who would like to undergo training to become Lay Worship Assistants. In total, nine people, including five churchwardens, undertook the LWA course and were all licensed together.

# Wells Archdeaconry



**Making a difference:** St Peter's Community Centre in Westfield Yeovil, is run as a partnership between the church and local community associations. Together, they provide support for an area identified in the 2011 census as one of the 10% most deprived areas in the country. Open four days a week, the centre employs a cook and provides free drinks and lunches. There's a pop-up library, free Wi-Fi, regular community coffee mornings, and a school uniform rail.



**Learning to listen:** Twenty people in the Benefice of Street, Walton, and Compton Dundon attended a listening course. The group reflected that listening to others is a key part of their relationships. They recognised listening enables all relationships to grow and develop, relationships with one another and our relationship with God.



**Worshipping together:** More than 10,000 people work on the construction site of Hinkley point C nuclear power station. It is the first building site in Britain to have a salaried chaplain and seven volunteer chaplains. Spiritual ceremonies are held before all major construction activities. Lead Chaplain Ewen Huffman has established regular daily prayers for and with staff.

## **The beauty and depth of faith:**

Two unique art exhibitions created by local artists were held inside St John's Church, Highbridge. They encouraged visitors to reflect on God's world and their impact on it. The exhibits also prompted many conversations about the beauty and depth of the Christian faith.



# Bath Archdeaconry



## Creating a space for young people to encounter God:

During the Covid lockdown, Bath's youth leaders regularly met online. Their vision, forged during the challenging times, has blossomed. A2 nights (named after Acts ii) for 11 to 18-year-olds are thriving. Gathering monthly at St Matthew's Church and drawing participants from all corners of Bath, they now have over 300 young people signed up, with 60 to 80 attending each month.



## Puppet-packed, Jesus centred church:

Bubble Church at St John's in Peasedown is a Sunday church service for babies, toddlers, and young families, encouraging adults and children learn about the Christian faith alongside one another. The family centric service focuses on involvement and the integration of how to delve deeper into faith while having fun together.



## A seaside baptism:

Motivated by his desire to publicly declare his faith and commitment, Jacob, a youth member of St. Peter's, Portishead chose to undergo his baptism in the sea. The open setting provided an opportunity to talk about the Christian faith with others in the community who had gathered on the beach.



## Growing together in faith:

On their journey to a Bronze Eco Church award, the Church of St Michael and All Angels, Flax Bourton, used Bible study, prayer meetings and Sunday worship to deepen their understanding of, and commitment to, creation care while also finding that it was a great way to start conversations with and involve their wider community.

Discover more about  
the ways people in  
our diocese are living  
and telling the story  
of Jesus every day



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