

Making a difference

The Revd David Keen, Vicar at St Peter's, Yeovil shares how the support they offer from their community centre is making a difference.



A warm welcome awaits at St Peter's

Tell us about the centre.

We have a purpose-built building, connected to the church, which replaced an old church hall. We partnered with a local community association and others to build it in 2019, with the vision of making a difference to our community, Westfield in Yeovil, which has high levels of deprivation.

What does the centre offer?

When we reopened after Covid and the cost-of-living crisis hit, the idea of Warm Hubs was being floated and it seemed an obvious use for the centre. We now open four days a week, employ a cook and provide free drinks and lunches. We already had several groups and support services in the centre, including a mental health café, a job club, art for dementia, so it wasn't a massive stretch to build on that. We also set up a Community Pantry - members pay £3.50 a week to get roughly £35 worth of food. Because members can join for up to six months we can build relationships - get to know

the needs and signpost support.

How is the church involved?

The centre is run by a sub-committee of the PCC that includes people from the community association, Abri Housing, and from the church. We talk a lot at St Peters about being hospitable and available, whether that's on the welcome desk, or helping at our weekly Community Coffee. As we get to know folk we're building lots of links between church and community.

Is your vision coming to fruition?

We are seeing signs of it coming to fruition. We are getting 70-90 people coming in for meals or drinks weekly, and people come for company as much as the food. Even in the summer people valued it as a community centre, so we've kept it running all year and seen no drop off in numbers.

Any advice for others wishing to do this where they are?

Don't do it on your own. Find other groups in your community who have the same care and the same idea and say, 'How can we do this together?'

Hear more at bathandwells.org.uk/st-peters-yeovil

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From the Church of England Diocese of Bath and Wells ☩

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Taking action for good

Christian communities across Bath and Wells support the neighbourhoods they serve in a host of different ways – from the more traditional support for initiatives such as community fridges and foodbanks that address food poverty, to walking alongside their community and fostering community growth in more unexpected places like football clubs and workplaces.

In Bath, individual churches from different denominations have come together in a new network facilitated by the Genesis Trust, recognising that by linking their community hubs they can collectively offer 'good help' to individuals and families in every part of the city.

Pippa Page, Reader at All Saints Weston, says, "Good Help' is helping people move forward with their lives in whatever way is right for them – in contrast to not-good help which is well-meaning social action that perpetuates dependency. By connecting via a Churches Hublink Network, our network of



One way Whiteway Pioneer Rachel Spence supports her community is through football.

23 churches from Bath can support each other and learn from each other to offer just that. Every church will continue to offer their communities help through their own community hubs, but by coming together we can become a shared mission of the church, a shared resource for the city."

We may live in challenging times, but there are Christian communities - in churches, in workplaces and in schools - who are taking action for good. Could you join in where you are?

Find other stories of church communities in action at bathandwells.org.uk/news

News in brief

Good global neighbours

Pupils at St Bartholomew's CE Primary School have been presented with a Bronze Award from Christian Aid's Global Neighbours Scheme for their global citizenship work.

From creating bee gardens, sending water purifying materials to Morocco to toilet twinning, pupils and staff at this wonderful Crewkerne primary school have been working hard to take their place as compassionate global citizens.



Sustainable flowers

More than 40 church flower arrangers from 15 churches attended St James' in Taunton to learn how to arrange flowers in a more environmentally-friendly way. Research suggests that traditional floral foam, also known as oasis, is non-recyclable and contains the same amount of plastic as 10 plastic

The Souls of our Shoes

An exhibition by the Mothers' Union has been on display in Wells Cathedral, and at November's Diocesan Synod, to draw attention to the issue of domestic violence. It features shoes of all different styles, sizes, and colours along with a comment from those who have walked away from abuse and those who have journeyed with them. Created by the Mothers' Union in Scotland, it is an extension of the Union's initiatives to highlight abuse, and the practical and prayerful support that is offered to families. It is hoped it can "provide a reminder that with timely help, many can escape from their abusive situations, rebuild their confidence and live in safety." ■

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shopping bags.

Angie Blackwell of Cottage Flowers, Ilminster shared her alternatives and Lyn from St James' said, "Angie shared lots of hints and tips... I for one certainly came away more confident in moving away from using floral foam and taken another step toward an eco-friendlier ministry in flowers." ■

Hope in deed

I'd love to be writing a sunny New Year's article reflecting a boundless global optimism about the future. Yet the reality is very different. War in Ukraine drags on and tensions in the Middle East remain dangerous. The cost-of-living crisis continues and many are finding things tough. Pessimism rather than optimism is the order of our day.

In such circumstances, where can hope be found? For Christians, confidence and assurance rest in the promise of the future that God has in store for us. In the Bible God says: 'See, I am making all things new. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end' (Revelation 21: 5-6). Christian hope is that whatever may be happening to us now, God has a very different and favourable future in store for us.

Critically, the point of such hope is not just to enable us to say 'Well don't worry about present circumstances. It's all going to be all right eventually.' Hope's purpose is to shape how we live and what we do now. It's to enable us to live out the words of the old Christian Aid poster that said, 'We believe in life before death'.

Towards the end of last year, I had the privilege of visiting a number of the deaneries of our diocese. On those visits I heard at first-hand how through the work of our parishes, schools and chaplaincies, Christian hope translates into practical action for good amongst the everyday lives of local communities. We are offering debt counselling and food banks, support for families and care of the lonely and isolated. All these and many more were amazing examples of how we can join with God to 'make all things new' right here, right now.

So as we start a new year, please can I encourage us all not to stare into our glasses, lamenting their being half full? Rather, through how we live and what we do, let us fill them with the new wine of God's kingdom – overflowing to the brim. For that is hope in deed.

Bishop Michael

