

# archdeacons' visitation news

## Dear Churchwardens



The Venerable Justly Hill was Archdeacon of Buckingham from 1825-58. There are many stories told about him. One concerns his Visitation to a rural Buckinghamshire parish. He entered the churchyard expecting to see the usual rows of gravestones – only to see about half of it dug up and planted with rows of potatoes.

Archdeacon Hill, horrified, exclaimed, *“What, what! Potatoes, potatoes! This is very wrong, very wrong indeed!”*  
*“Yes, Sir,”* came the reply from the Churchwarden... *“I know it is... for t’were taters last year and taters the year afore and it ought to have been wheat this year.”*

We are glad to report that under the care of the present generation of Churchwardens, the churchyards of the Diocese of Oxford remain in rather better order than the above report suggests was the case in years gone by.

Whether this is your first or your fifth Visitation, this is a moment to say a sincere thank you to you for your service over the past year. Although we know the role can be demanding, nonetheless we hope you have found your calling as Churchwarden to be a fulfilling one. Week by week, our parish churches are places where the good news of Jesus Christ is proclaimed in word, in worship and in action. Underpinning the many ways in which the gospel is lived out is the vital practical ministry of service which you offer.

We hope you find the contents of this year’s *Visitation News* useful as you serve your parish as Churchwarden. As ever, if there is anything we can do to assist you in your work, please don’t hesitate to get in touch.

With best wishes,

**The Ven Guy Elsmore**  
Archdeacon of Buckingham

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## Small church with a big project?

Every 20-30 years, most churches will require a major building project of some kind. It could be significant repairs, new heating, reordering, the installation of facilities or the building of an extension. Such a project can be a significant challenge, especially for a small church.



Photo: Abigail Lloyd

### Five top tips

- Prepare for the long haul. Major projects are seldom completed in a year or two. Think about four–five years as a realistic timescale from starting to plan to completion.
- Talk to other parishes which have recently completed similar projects (your Parish Development Adviser/Archdeacon can put you in touch).
- If your church is a listed building, you can reclaim VAT from Topmark on most works to the fabric of the building.
- Think about employing a professional bid writer to support you with identifying funding sources and writing bids.
- If you are planning to develop your building for mission, the Crossing the Threshold toolkit from the Diocese of Hereford website has a wealth of advice.

# Meet Andy Lowe

David Tyler, the Archdeacon of Dorchester, caught up with Andy Lowe, a Churchwarden in Abingdon, to find out what his top tips are for being a Churchwarden.

David and Andy have known each other for a couple of years and David asked him a few questions about his ministry as a Churchwarden:



## Where do you serve as Churchwarden?

I'm one of the Churchwardens at Christ Church in North Abingdon. I'm married to Kate with three children between 11 and 17 years old, and I work full-time in IT. Part of the role also includes being an ex-officio director for The Barns Café, our on-site café serving the people of North Abingdon.

## How long have you been a Churchwarden?

I've been a warden for just over two years.

## What is your biggest joy in being a Churchwarden, and what challenges do you face?

Serving at Christ Church has been a real blessing to me, and opened my eyes to the breadth of ministry and the level of hard work that staff and volunteers put into leading, creating, operating, ministering across so many ministry areas. Whilst seeing this day to day is a joy, it's also one of the biggest challenges – keeping abreast of everything that is happening and how it can continue to be sustained longer term. We have four services on a Sunday across two sites, so being present and understanding the opportunities and challenges of each service is tricky.

Above: Andy enjoying a well-earned break  
Below: The buildings making up Christ Church



Christ Church is very blessed to have really dedicated staff and volunteers who look after the day-to-day operating of functions across the church, so I am also very fortunate to be a warden in a team like this – it makes my role considerably easier.

## So, your role as Churchwarden will be different to many who are reading this interview, but what are your top tips for Churchwardens?

The tips I've noted here are as much for myself as they are for others. I'm far from a perfect warden, and producing this list has been as much an exercise of self-reflection as anything else!

### > TIP 1

There is always more work than you have time or energy to do. Be clear about what you can and can't do and, as best you can, set realistic deadlines.

### > TIP 2

Keep good notes – Churchwardens cover a lot of ground. I, for one, can't keep it all in my head (especially as I work full-time).

### > TIP 3

If you have more than one warden, try to split the role according to skills, availability of time, or specific projects. Try to minimise doubling up on projects to help with clarity and ownership.

### > TIP 4

Don't do it all yourself. Christ Church is very lucky to have an Ops Manager and many willing volunteers, but if we didn't, I'd try to build a team to take responsibility for specific tasks (utilities, buildings, rotas, etc.). Use the giftings of folk in your congregation.

### > TIP 5

If it's not bolted down, expect to move it at some point. I've lost count of the number of chairs and tables I've moved!

### > TIP 6

Be present. This is a tip I don't live by very well. I too often busy myself with jobs around the start and end of services, but I should be more available for the congregation to talk to.

### > TIP 7

Spend some time with your incumbent, outside of the usual standing committee and PCC meetings. It is a time to reflect and pray about priorities, challenges, praise points, etc., and a time to share things in confidence.

### > TIP 8

Attend diocesan training for wardens. (No, this isn't a plug – they're genuinely useful!) It's a good opportunity to talk to other wardens and you'll come away with some useful insights. [Ed: thank you, Andy! And no, we really didn't ask Andy to write this.]

### > TIP 9

Pray – commit your warden's work and priorities to the Lord and he will give you strength and guidance.





## Making the ask



**Did you know that the Parish Share raised by our church congregations will account for an amazing 70% of the money the diocese spends from the core budget in 2023? That's a huge amount of money for us all to raise, and with high inflation, fundraising needs to be firmly on the agenda of every PCC.**

Mission and ministry across the diocese costs around £29m each year. Clergy stipends are by far our biggest expenditure, at around £19m. Despite high inflation rates, we've been able to increase stipends by 3% for 2022/3 and, for the third year running, freeze any increase in the average Parish Share.

But an increase in Parish Share will be needed for 2024 as a result of inflationary pressures. That's not as hard as perhaps it first sounds; many members of the congregation will have pensions or salaries that increase each year. And did you know that most people who sign up for the Parish Giving Scheme agree to link their donations to inflation?

The Anglican Giving Survey found that our encouragement of giving can be significantly improved with simple changes in practice. Here are five simple things that you can do:

1. Regularly communicate the needs of the church and the impact of people's giving.
2. Promote and encourage ways to give regularly, such as the Parish Giving Scheme.
3. Ask the congregation to review their giving as part of an annual giving campaign.
4. Help people to learn about living a generous life as part of their discipleship.
5. Thank people regularly for their giving.

### Find out more

Our Generous Giving team is on hand to help you nurture and grow a culture of giving and generosity in your parish.

[oxford.anglican.org/giving-and-fundraising](https://oxford.anglican.org/giving-and-fundraising)

*On the Money*, updated in June each year, is one of a number of resources that explain diocesan finances and the difference we make together. [oxford.anglican.org/on-the-money](https://oxford.anglican.org/on-the-money)

## Homes for Ukraine – supporting people fleeing war

**Most people want a safe place to live, to look to the future with optimism and to care and provide for their families. Most people are not that lucky.**

Almost a year ago, the Diocese of Oxford partnered with Citizens UK to support people from Ukraine to find a sponsor willing to offer them a temporary home in the UK.

We were able to find hosts offering, between them, over 700 beds, and we started the process of matching hosts and refugees, and then applying for visas.

Our first guests began to arrive and were welcomed into our communities, supported by many hundreds of extra volunteers helping with transport, form filling and teaching English.

As a diocese, we also recruited a Ukrainian Support Worker (Tanya Sazonova) to help with visas and communication.

A year since our first guests arrived, we are still seeking hosts.

Some of the people applying to come to the UK are still in Ukraine, and as the war continues and impacts their daily life more and more, they are finally making the decision to flee. Others are



Inna (back left) enjoying life with her host family, John, Pam and Debbie

people who left Ukraine last year and have found themselves waiting near the border, in places like Poland, Romania and Moldova. As the conflict has dragged on, they are now having to reassess their options. Staying on the border is not easy – staying in 'safety' on the edge of Ukraine isn't a long-term option. The housing there is temporary, communal and unstable, and settling, even for a while, is difficult.

We are receiving requests from Ukrainians seeking to take that next step in their journey. They want to return to Ukraine, but they can't right now. They want to settle, for a while, and have some peace, and rebuild their lives.

If anyone in your congregation is able to offer a safe place to a Ukrainian refugee, they should contact Tanya ([tanya.sazonova@oxford.anglican.org](mailto:tanya.sazonova@oxford.anglican.org)) to talk about the sort of placement that would be right for them.

I would be really happy to share my own experience of hosting, and also to talk about issues relating to refugees and asylum seekers with your church.

**The Reverend Canon Liz Jackson**  
[liz.jackson@oxford.anglican.org](mailto:liz.jackson@oxford.anglican.org)

# Just open the door

**‘Cool Space’ in the summer heat of 2022 and ‘Warm Spaces’ in the winter cold of 2023 – this could be an article about climate change and Eco Church. Instead, it is about being open to the missional opportunities and possibilities that open up right on our doorsteps.**

Responding to the invitation to open their church during the summer heat last year, St Mary’s, Weston Turville advertised their Cool Space on the village Facebook page and opened their church door. They had no idea if anyone would come. A few older people turned



up, and so did two young mums with their babies from one of the new developments on the edge of their community. They loved the cool interior of the beautiful medieval church, tucked away down a quiet lane. They were made to feel very welcome with toys, space and chat. In fact, they enjoyed it so much they asked if they could return the next day, and they did... with friends. St Mary’s tentative plan to open for two days became the whole week, and on the Saturday a dad even came along with his child.

The Cool Space became a place where new residents got to know one another and connect with the life of the local church and community. An informal Nativity was planned, but Mary went down with chickenpox and the three wise men didn’t turn up, so the first child through the door became Mary and three dads became wise men, and everyone got to play a part. Babies have since become toddlers and the group formed what is now a thriving baby and toddler playgroup which meets twice a month in the church, with up to nine families regularly attending. This has begun to feed into the Sunday worship of the church through a half-hour simple service

aimed at young families, with instruments, crafts, stories and a Breakfast Service. Parents have also begun requesting baptism for their children.

All because they just opened the door. The difficult and challenging question of how a small and older congregation could reach out to residents on five new developments has begun to be answered by simply opening the door to an opportunity and seeing what might happen.



Photo: Michał Parzuchowski/Unsplash. Photo left: Chris Bull

## A cool place to play

Summer 2023 is likely to be a good time for Cool Spaces again, and the cost-of-living crisis, social isolation and a thousand and one other issues offer opportunities for food banks, quiet space, and tea and chat moments. I wonder what stories we might be telling one another in the months to come by just opening the door to the opportunities that lie on doorsteps in our communities?

**The Revd Canon Chris Bull**

Associate Archdeacon of Buckingham

### For more information

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