

# archdeacons' visitation news

## Dear Churchwardens

You play a crucial role in the life of every parish within our diocese, and we are incredibly grateful for all that you do. Without your service, leadership and commitment, our parishes simply couldn't exist, let alone flourish. On behalf of the Archdeacons I want to express our deep and heartfelt thanks for your ministry.

We would also like to express our thanks to Ecclesiastical for its commitment to providing a great service to the Church of England, which goes beyond the normal expectations of any commercial relationship. We would especially like to thank Helen Richards and Michael Angell for their ongoing help and guidance.

The coming year will bring a unique mix of joys and challenges for you as Churchwardens. It's also a year of aspiration, particularly in how we hope to develop our ministry with the emerging generations. Bishop Steven has asked us to prioritise our work with children, young people, families and schools. We know that parishes can't keep doing ever more, and so choices may need to be made in order to give sufficient attention to this ministry. We trust that you will offer words of prayerful wisdom to your incumbents and PCCs about ensuring the best use of the parish's resources within the limits of what is manageable.

Please pay attention to your own wellbeing. It's important to us that you flourish amongst the busyness and in a role that can be particularly demanding at times. The Archdeacons will be praying for you as we hope you will be praying for us. We are here to help you, so please contact us whenever you would value some advice or support, or even if you just want to talk something over. In the meantime, we pray for all wisdom and understanding as you serve in the places God has called you.

**The Ven Stephen Pullin**, Archdeacon of Berkshire



### Berkshire Archdeaconry

**The Ven Stephen Pullin**

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Photo: Ed Nix

## Working with the clergy



Mr Collins – perhaps Jane Austen's least attractive clergyman!  
Illustration by Hugh Thomson

My favourite novelist, Jane Austen, knew a lot about the church, being a clergyman's daughter and among the keenest observers of English society who ever put pen to paper. When considering how much has changed in the modern C of E, I often think of one of her fictional incumbents, Dr Grant in *Mansfield Park*, who leaves the parish to take up a canon's stall at Westminster, only to find that his new lifestyle 'brought on apoplexy and death, by three great institutional dinners in one week'. Fortunately, our own time sees very few clergy sent to meet their Lord by too much feasting.

Our parochial system is, in some ways, unchanged by many centuries. In others, it is completely transformed. The old model of a single vicar in a single village is long gone: a real Vicar of Dibley would have half a dozen villages, each the size of Dibley. While the clergy remain bound to preach the gospel, celebrate the sacraments and serve the community in the settings where they minister, they and those settings are very different from the rural idylls of the past.

Instead of being a uniform collection of white male gentry, our clergy bring a far greater breadth of background and life experience into the ministry when they are ordained. Most have had previous careers, and for many these continue; many or most are ordained in middle age; they may be married, divorced or widowed; they might well be adult converts to Christianity; they might only have joined the Church of England a few years before beginning their ministerial training.

Working with the clergy will always be a matter of collaboration and of discernment. Collaboration, because as a church we can only hope to be Christ-like if we give of ourselves to others and seek to build community as we work together. And discernment, because that working together will often be a matter of identifying the gifts that different people, lay and ordained, bring to the parishes and other communities in which we find ourselves.

Some clergy will come into ministry with a background in finance. Most won't. Some will have extensive experience of project management. Most won't. Some will have spent a great deal of time in schools and in children's work. Many will not. But in each of these cases, our parish communities will contain people who can contribute. For Churchwardens in particular, the ability to identify those people and to bring together the gifts with which God has blessed our parishes will be of enormous value.

Clergy will practise differing patterns of work. Priesthood is always 'full time', as one cannot cease to be a priest once ordained. But our ministerial work will differ. Clergy should be clear with colleagues and lay leaders what their work patterns are. Those leaders should do their best to make those patterns work for everybody, and this is absolutely a reciprocal endeavour: just as lay volunteers should support one another as well as the clergy, so the clergy must take care not to demand too much or to rely excessively on those who are giving their time and their limited energy freely.

At the same time, the importance of support for the clergy in simple and often little things cannot be underestimated. Do we spend time together, just for the sake of it – when did the clergy and wardens last enjoy a pub lunch together, for example? Do we look out for one another's care – are the clergy taking their days off, going on holiday, allowing time for retreats and quiet days? Do the deanery and the diocese support our clergy adequately? If not, complain to your Archdeacon!

In all of these responsibilities, we are called to use our gifts and to encourage others to do the same. Never give in to clericalism – sometimes things will be best done by someone ordained, and sometimes they won't. When working with the clergy, good practice will involve praying together, learning together, communicating well, clarifying roles, boundaries and responsibilities, and being willing to provide support when things go wrong. God entrusts us with the gifts of his love for the ministry of the gospel. As we love and trust one another, so we can work together for the good of our world.

### Peter Groves

(Below) Clergy in our diocese at the Chrism Mass. Photo: Rowan Lake





# Nurturing your spirit: a guide for Churchwardens



Morning view from the prayer cabin at Stanton House

Being a Churchwarden is a rewarding but often demanding role. As you dedicate your time and energy to serving your parish, it's easy for your own spiritual wellbeing to take a back seat. Remember, your ability to serve others effectively flows from the wellspring of your relationship with God.

Here are a few tips to help you nurture your spiritual life amidst the busyness:

- **Prioritise prayer and reflection:** Carve out regular moments for quiet prayer and contemplation. Whether it's a few minutes in the morning, midday prayer, or evening reflection, make intentional time to connect with God.
- **Seek support and community:** Build relationships with fellow Churchwardens, your incumbent, or a spiritual mentor. Share your experiences, challenges and joys with someone who understands your unique journey and the challenges of being a Churchwarden.
- **Step back and recharge:** It's OK to say "no" sometimes. Practise setting healthy boundaries and delegating tasks to avoid burnout. Taking time for rest and renewal will make you a more effective servant-leader.
- **Nurture outside interests:** Maintain hobbies and activities outside your role as Churchwarden. These nourish your soul, provide balance, and help you maintain perspective.
- **Give yourself grace:** Don't strive for perfection. You will make mistakes, and that's OK! Embrace your time in office as a journey of growth.

## Resources to consider:

- **Spiritual direction:** Consider meeting regularly with a spiritual director for guidance and deeper exploration of your faith.
- **Retreats:** We are blessed with several wonderful retreat houses in the diocese, so even if you can't get away for a few days' retreat, a quiet day somewhere like Stanton House or CSMV Wantage can be wonderfully refreshing.
- **Worship elsewhere (occasionally!):** If your church doesn't have a Sunday evening service, why not worship somewhere that does? Or go to a different church for a weekday service. It is vital to have times of worship when you can receive from God, aside from the pressures and responsibilities you carry as Churchwarden.

Remember, a vibrant spiritual life is not a luxury but a necessity for sustainable service as a Churchwarden. By caring for your own soul, you'll have deeper resources to draw from as you serve your church and community.



Blewbury churchyard

Photo: Alison Riggs

## Churchyards as havens for nature

The recent Synod motion on Land and Nature has brought the vital role of caring for creation to the forefront of the Church of England's mission. Churchyards, with their unique green spaces, can be havens for wildlife and biodiversity in an increasingly urbanized world. Churchwardens have a wonderful opportunity to embrace this responsibility.

The motion, championed by the Bishop of Norwich, recognises the perilous state of biodiversity in Britain. Our churchyards provide vital pockets of green space where wildflowers flourish, insects thrive and birds find refuge. Even small changes in churchyard management can make a big difference.

### Simple steps, big impact

Steps you can take to make your churchyard a haven for nature:

- **Reduce mowing:** Reducing the frequency of mowing allows wildflowers to bloom and provides habitat for insects and small creatures. Wildflower meadows are beautiful and require less maintenance.
- **Create borders:** Plant native shrubs and trees around the perimeter of the churchyard. These provide food and shelter for a variety of wildlife.
- **Let nature take its course:** Allow some areas of the churchyard to grow wild, creating a haven for insects, birds and small mammals.
- **Build bug hotels and bird boxes:** Provide nesting sites for birds and solitary bees.
- **Involve the community:** Hold 'Rake and Cake' days after strimming long grass in late summer or create mini wildlife ponds to engage others in caring for the churchyard.

### Many benefits

Studies have shown that connecting with nature can reduce stress, improve mental wellbeing and foster a sense of peace and tranquility. Churchyards can become sanctuaries for quiet reflection and spiritual renewal, complementing the church's ministry.

### Working together

Churchwardens play a key role in leading by example. By embracing these practices and informing the PCC, you can inspire others to join the effort. Remember, there are resources available to help you on this journey, particularly [caringforgodsacre.org.uk](http://caringforgodsacre.org.uk) and [bbowt.org.uk/team-wilder-churches](http://bbowt.org.uk/team-wilder-churches)

The Church of England has a long tradition of caring for God's creation. By fostering nature in our churchyards, we not only enhance the beauty of our church grounds but also contribute to a healthier, more biodiverse world. Let's embrace this responsibility and transform our churchyards into flourishing sanctuaries for nature and for people.

**Guy Elsmore**

# Meet Jane Haslam



**The Revd Prebendary Jane Haslam is Associate Archdeacon of Dorchester and Area Dean of Aston and Cuddesdon. We asked her:**

## What drew you to our diocese?

After 25 years in parish ministry, I believed that God was calling me to a different role. One possibility was that of an Archdeacon, and I was encouraged in this by the support of senior colleagues in Bath and Wells.

The role in Dorchester appealed, partly because of a sense of coming back to an area I knew, but mostly because of the vision of 'becoming a more Christ-like Church – more contemplative, compassionate and courageous for the sake of God's world'. This aspiration resonated deeply with me. It is something I try to live out in my own life, but also something I believed I would be privileged to encourage in the lives of others. I am a trained spiritual director with a long interest in spirituality. I believe compassion is at the heart of much of our ministry and service on the ground to others. I know that there are times when we need to be courageous in the working out of our contemplation and compassion. There is also a wonderful cyclical nature to these three Cs as the need to be courageous often encourages us to be more contemplative too.

## What inspires you in practice?

As an ordinand, I was asked to read *The Christian Priest Today* by Archbishop Michael Ramsey. One of the lines from this book has stayed with me over the years as an ordained minister: 'being with God with the people on your heart'. For me, this is the essence of my vocation and inspires me. To be with God and bring people to God.

This can happen in many different ways – through intercession for people, by spending time with people, by trying to communicate the Christian faith in different ways and to commend it to people. It is about being with people at all times in their lives and recognising what a privilege this is. It is about working to make life better here and now and responding to people's needs when I can. My own family inspire me, and I learn so much from them.

I am also inspired by the Rule of St Benedict and the vows of obedience (listening), stability and conversion of life. There is so much wisdom in Benedict's writings that can be applied to life today and I have found it helpful when so much of life can seem ordinary and everyday. Benedict's rule shows how to make the most of life and to find God in the routine. Recently, I have read Paula Gooder's book, *Everyday God*, which expands on this theme, and I recommend it to everyone. We have a God who loved the world so much that he came to earth in the person of Jesus to be with his people, to experience their life and to lead them on the Way. This is the greatest inspiration of all and a way I try to follow.

## What is your message to our wonderful Churchwardens?

You are heroes! Thank you for all you do.



## For more information

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