

Pathways

The magazine for the people of the Diocese of Oxford | January–March 2022 | **FREE**



Called

... to a new identity

PLUS: Your Cathedral pass | Tackling poverty | How to slow down

Hello



I've begun a series of visits to every deanery in the diocese. I'll be spending time with clergy, lay leaders and parishioners to listen again to where we are as a Church. All are welcome, and you'll find details on the website.

We're hearing stories of hope and renewal at each visit, but seeing many challenges too. Blended services, changes in attendance patterns and volunteering are all adding to the load of our parishes. And we don't yet fully understand what it means to live with COVID-19.

Change and disruption are certain, but it's also beyond doubt that our nation will need its churches in the months and years to come to be centres of new life and growth and mercy. The future of our churches does not depend on us. The future of the Church and of society is in God's hands. With God there is always the possibility of new life. We must put our trust in him.

This edition of *Pathways* takes as its theme our Christian calling and how we live in this world. Many of us find it hard to be still, to have an empty day or a couple of hours when we are not sure what to do.

One of the reasons for our restlessness is that when we stop, when we allow space, all of the pain and questions rise to the surface. Turn to page 9 to discover a slowing technique used by the Ignatian religious community, the Chemin Neuf.

Our common vision theme in this issue is Poverty and Inequality. The concept of fairness runs through the Scriptures like a watermark. Our parishes are already doing much to love and support the poorest in our communities through a wide range of social action projects. Even so, many *Pathways* readers, and there are 23,000 of us, will be able to pick up at least one of the ideas on page 17.

And finally, I do hope you'll be able to join in with Come and See during Lent: our big, warm open invitation to the whole diocese to explore faith. This year Come and See is based around the Lord's Prayer. The resources are geared to first time enquirers and those who have been part of the Church for many years. You'll find details of how to sign up at the back.

Bishop Steven
oxford.anglican.org/bishop-of-oxford

Contents



6 God in the life of...
Sheila Furlong

8 Step one
Slow down

10 The Bible on...
Being yourself

12 Opinion
Old church buildings: blessing or millstone?

Special pull-out feature
Cathedral Parishioner Pass

15 For the sake of God's world
Addressing poverty and inequality

17 10 ways to...
Address poverty

18 Focus on...
Nimbyism

20 Dwelling in the Word

22 A prayer for being me

23 Who told you?



We hope you enjoy reading *Pathways*. Email or write and let us know what you think. Contributor enquiries are welcome.

Pathways is published four times a year by the Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance. To receive the magazine regularly, or to order bundles for your church, please get in touch.

Follow us on Twitter and Facebook for local news and prayers.

To get in touch with *Pathways* email us at communications@oxford.anglican.org or write to *Pathways* Magazine, Church House Oxford, Langford Locks, Kidlington, OX5 1GF



Pathways is printed locally in Hook Norton by kmslitho.co.uk using sustainable uncoated paper. When you're done, cut it up for the church notice board, use it for children's group activities or pop it in the recycling bin.

Design by **15-north.co.uk** Cover image: *The Call* by Jorge Cocco Santángelo coccofineart.com
Words and photographs © Oxford Diocese 2022, unless otherwise indicated.

UK registered charity number 247954
ISSN 2632-0401

Rosemary Meara



Praying for the planet

Ahead of the COP26 Climate Summit, churches in Kidlington joined together for a nine-day, 24-hour 'Eco Novena' prayer relay for the planet. Churches around the diocese have been supporting diocesan efforts to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2035 and working towards achieving A Rocha Eco Church Awards.

oxford.anglican.org/environment

Madeleine Hayden



Headteachers and governors

After last year's pandemic restrictions, headteachers and governors from church schools across the diocese joined together for an annual service of celebration and thanksgiving at Dorchester Abbey. School staff have been working tirelessly to ensure a high quality of education for thousands of children across the Thames Valley.

odbe.org.uk

For regular news and updates, visit the website: oxford.anglican.org/news





Tackling digital poverty

On the Fishermead estate in Milton Keynes, the pandemic brought to light high levels of deprivation and a significant digital divide. The Revd Ian Herbert at Trinity Church came up with an internet café to help tackle digital poverty. The project will be just one of the ways churches in the diocese have responded to the needs of their communities.

oxford.anglican.org/poverty-inequality



Where the lights are always on

Over many years, Emmanuel Church, Woodley identified a need for better facilities to foster strong community cohesion and provide a multifunctional space for local groups. The Neighbourhood Centre extension was completed in September and now houses a range of church and community activities, including the local food bank, youth work and after-school drop-ins, dog training and debt advice.

oxford.anglican.org/development-fund

We're on social media too.
Search 'Diocese of Oxford'
on Facebook and Instagram.



*"I have always had
that sense of God
leading me."*

Sheila Furlong

Sheila is the CEO of The Archway Foundation, which has been providing a lifeline for adults struggling with loneliness in Oxford for almost 40 years.

God has been part of Sheila's life from a young age as she grew up with parents who were regular churchgoers. However, it wasn't until Sheila moved away from home as a young adult that she worked out how the Christian faith was something that could belong to her.

"The faith of my parents was lived out rather than spoken about. I never doubted a belief in God but as an adult, when I went to different churches with an emphasis on the personal relationship of faith in Christ, I lapped up all the teaching I realised I had lacked in my earlier years."

Sheila began her career working as a nurse, initially in general medicine and then mental health and child psychiatry. Alongside nursing, Sheila volunteered with The Archway Foundation in its early beginnings. She never expected to move away from nursing but always felt that God had something else planned for her. After 20 years in nursing, Sheila joined the Archway charity as CEO, where she has now been for more than 20 years.

Faith has been an intrinsic part of daily life for Sheila since being a young adult. Making time for daily prayer and Bible reading helps her to live out her faith in both word and action. Sheila is drawn to the example of Jesus' life; he regularly spoke and taught but always took action and

demonstrated his love for all people in practical and tangible ways.

"It is a balance of praying and trusting at the same time as identifying the part I have to play in God's story. I see that manifesting in all areas of my family, work and social life... Whatever I have done and wherever I have been, I have always had that sense of God leading me."

Sheila's strong faith and relationship with Jesus has always influenced her work, and her time is now well filled overseeing the running of the charity and its staff team.

"It is hard to separate faith from life and work because they are so integrated. God's leading and my relationship with Christ is an ongoing journey; it influences everything I do and think about."

"My relationship with God helps me to relate to other people, to draw alongside them at their point of need, to listen without judgement, to demonstrate genuine care and compassion. We all need to be loved and to know that we matter to someone. I know that I am loved by God, and I feel called to share this love with others." ¶

Words: Madeleine Hayden

Photo: Emma Thompson



Loneliness can affect any of us, at any time in our lives. Why not explore what support networks or groups exist in your parish, and how to support others struggling with loneliness?

CHOOSE
place, time

ENTER
graciously

ASK
for a gift

DWELL
in the Word

SHARE
with Jesus

LEAVE
with gratitude
and respect

NOTE
God's call
for your life

Slow down

Do you find it difficult to rest? Do you find yourself neglecting to spend time with God? This technique might just help you to get in step with God's agenda.

This is a specific form of *Lectio Divina* (or Dwelling in the Word) used by the Ignatian religious community, the Chemin Neuf. It is tailored for the individual as they seek God's presence and discernment. It can help form a pattern of regular deep spiritual encounter with the Lord.

Choose

Choose a realistic time frame and place. Be comfortable and intentional in making space for God. A short time can be very powerful if properly set up and protected. Could you put aside 30 minutes of your day? You may need more or less time.

Enter

How we enter a space often expresses the nature of the interaction we hope to have there. We hope and expect to enter the presence of the living God. You may like to do this by crossing yourself, bowing, using a simple prayer, or removing your shoes as Moses does in Exodus 3. Choose something which works for you.

Ask

What is on your heart today? Take a few moments to still and listen to yourself. What do you need today; what are you yearning for; for what does your heart ache? It might be for yourself, others, or the world. Ask God for a gift, or a grace as it is sometimes called.

Dwell

St Benedict suggests that we should read the Bible like a cow chews the cud, slowly digesting it and repeating a reading. With each reading ask yourself: *Which words, phrase or image capture*

my attention, or "taste good"? Where does my attention linger; what draws my interest? On the third or fourth reading something often resonates. This might be a seemingly insignificant word or something more obvious, but it will feel important for you.

Share

This is called the *colloquy*, or the *heart to heart*. Pray with Jesus, sharing your needs and what you found in the passage. Then listen with the ears of your heart to what Jesus might wish to say to you. This might be a word, image, phrase or feeling.

Leave

Leave respectfully and slowly, with a gesture, a prayer (the Gloria, for example), as you would if you were leaving someone's home with gratitude for hospitality.

Note

Make a note of what you experienced. What spoke to you from the text and your time of heart to heart with Jesus? Date it so you can come back to it in future to discern God's call. ↵

Words: The Revd Charlie Kerr, Chaplaincy Adviser



The ancient contemplative traditions of Christianity have a lot to offer today. Space Makers brings five mindful practices into our schools:
oxford.anglican.org/space-makers

Being yourself

Our culture places a lot of emphasis on the importance of being yourself. How does the Bible help us with this quest?

“Be yourself: everyone else is already taken!” So quipped the poet, playwright and witty epigrammatist Oscar Wilde. His words anticipate the celebration of individualism that is so prevalent in modern-day western culture. Often, messages from commercial advertisers tell us that, if only we buy more, then we’ll be able to express our individuality more expertly and be more fully ourselves.

Does the gospel accord with this Hollywood ideal of self-actualisation? Certainly not in a straightforward or self-indulgent sense. When we read the Bible, we see that it is in loving God, and worshipping with reckless abandon, that we truly and deeply become the people we were created to be.

The story of the woman who anoints Jesus is found in all four Gospels (Mark 14, Matthew 26, Luke 7 and John 12), although each evangelist includes different aspects of the story. All four Gospels agree that a woman anointed Jesus with costly perfume, to the chagrin of the religious folk who witnessed the incident.

In Mark and Matthew, an unnamed woman anoints Jesus’ head: a practice that was common for Old Testament kings and demonstrates Jesus’ kingship and messianic identity as the Christ (literally, the “anointed one”).

In Luke, we’re told that the woman is a sinner, and the story focuses on Jesus’ radical acceptance of outsiders. In John, the woman is named as Mary from Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, which draws attention to her loving relationship with Jesus. In Luke and John, the woman anoints Jesus’ feet and then dries them with her hair; a unique action without an extant parallel in ancient texts.

This woman’s response to Jesus exemplifies a person being truly herself, as she is caught up in deep, unadulterated worship. Her act is extravagant and costly, sacrificing pure spikenard perfume that would cost a year’s wages. It is fragrant, beautiful and intimate. It is an act of radical love, rebelling against the cold, regulatory expectations of the religious authorities; a generous and controversial demonstration of her allegiance to Jesus.

Jesus accurately predicts that she will be remembered for her actions. And in this story we are presented with a model for how our worship should be: exuberant, vulnerable and perhaps even transgressive. We are called to live lives focused on Jesus, rapt in adoration for him. This is the deepest, most fulfilling way that we can be ourselves and demonstrate our true identity, even when our authentic worship is costly and at odds with the expectations of others. ¶

Words: The Revd Sorrel Shamel-Wood, Curate, Dorchester Ministry Team



Everyone has a place at the Lord’s table. Read a letter from our bishops on inclusion and respect within the Church at blogs.oxford.anglican.org/clothe-yourselfes-with-love



REVEAL YOUR AUTHENTIC SELF

Be different, be unadulterated. The timeless fragrance for all God's children.
Brought to you from Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

pour femme | pour homme | pour vous

Blessing or millstone?



Kristina Vos-Petersen is a writer and editor. She lived in Oxford for many years and is now based in Amsterdam.

Pulling at the brakes, I slowed down my bike. Had I come to the right place? There was nothing to indicate that this building was also the home of a church – nothing except the people entering the front door. I locked my bike, entered the building and received a warm welcome.

Being new in the city, I was looking for a church and had been told about one that met in a school – a new experience for me. In previous places, I had been part of churches with beautiful buildings. The advantages are clear: not only is it lovely to worship in a magnificent space full of history, the building can also be an asset, a place that can easily be found by passers-by and be used for all kinds of mid-week activities. How would it be to be part of a church that held services in a school?

The hall was filled with rows of chairs and a movable pulpit with a simple cross. Children's groups met in classrooms near the hall.

*“resources...
could be better
spent on what
really matters”*

The focus during the service was not on outward trappings but on God and his Word alone. The furnishings of the hall could be adjusted to fit our needs. The hall could also

be hired for the occasional mid-week event.

It felt like a breath of fresh air to be part of a church without the huge responsibility and often burden of a building. I was part

of a church in Oxford for many years and loved the building. However, during my time on the PCC, I realised how much time, energy and money was spent dealing with the building. It needed to be cleaned and maintained. The carpets were filthy. The garden was overgrown. The roof was leaking. We needed to keep up with and adhere to health and safety regulations, risk assessments, fire regulations. The church needed people with the right expertise, with time and the willingness to deal with the issues. A great deal of money was spent on the building. These issues are not unique to that particular church.

Kristina's article continues on page 14



CHRIST
CHURCH
CATHEDRAL

Visit the
Cathedral
with a
Parishioner
Pass



A Sanctuary in the City

Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford

Find out more at chch.ox.ac.uk/cathedral and chch.ox.ac.uk/yourcathedral

Your Cathedral

Oxford is unique in having a Cathedral that is both the 'mother church' for the Diocese of Oxford and also a College Chapel within the University of Oxford.

The Cathedral is part of the joint foundation of Christ Church. The Christ Church site – which includes the beautiful Christ Church Meadow – extends over 175 acres in the heart of the busy city of Oxford. Our small Cathedral is set in the imposing setting of Tom Quad, the largest quadrangle in the University.

This beautiful building has its origins in the monastery church built by Augustinian monks at the end of the 12th century in the name of St Frideswide, Patron Saint of both the city and University of Oxford.

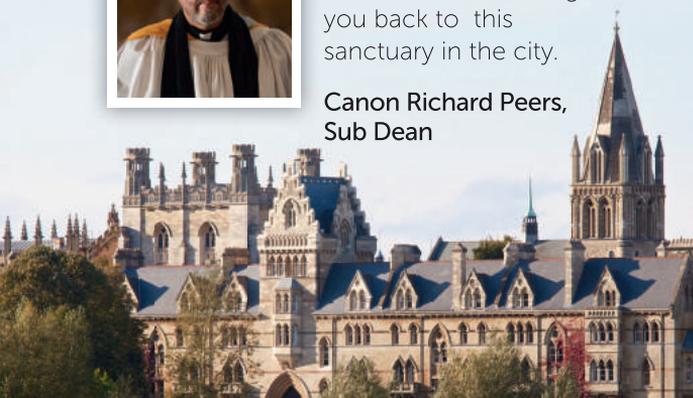
Today's Cathedral is home to a community whose worship is enhanced by a world-famous choral tradition. Alongside our daily offering of worship, the Cathedral hosts a wide range of concerts, exhibitions and diocesan events such as the annual St Frideswide Pilgrimage. We also welcome large numbers of pilgrims and visitors from all around the world.

Like every other church and cathedral, we had to make radical changes during the pandemic. We are now, God willing, moving into a new chapter with fewer restrictions.



Do come and see us. We very much look forward to welcoming you back to this sanctuary in the city.

**Canon Richard Peers,
Sub Dean**



Worship

The daily offering of worship to God is at the heart of Christ Church Cathedral.

Everyone is welcome to join us, whether for a single service or more regularly.

Sundays

8am	Holy Communion (1662)
10am	Said Matins (1662)
11am	Choral Eucharist (CW)
6pm	Choral Evensong (1662)

Weekdays

7.10am	Morning Prayer (CW)
7.30am	Holy Communion (CW)
1pm	Holy Communion (Wednesdays only) (1662)
6pm	Evening Prayer or Choral Evensong (1662)

Some of our services are livestreamed. For more information, including livestream links and our music list, see chch.ox.ac.uk/cathedral

Please note that our services begin five minutes later than 'normal' time, because the Cathedral keeps the old 'Oxford Time' (i.e. five minutes west of Greenwich). This means 6pm Oxford Time is 6.05pm GMT or BST.



Music

Choral music is at the heart of Cathedral worship.

We are lucky to have no fewer than four choirs: the Cathedral Choir, made up of boy choristers from our Cathedral School and adults known as Clerks; Frideswide Voices, our girls' choir whose members come from a variety of local schools; the Cathedral Singers; and the College Choir, drawn from students and staff.

During August and occasionally at other times of year we welcome visiting choirs from around the world. The Cathedral also hosts concerts throughout the year.

Pilgrimage

The Shrine of St Frideswide has been an important destination for pilgrims since medieval times.

Today, people remain drawn to the Latin Chapel and the Shrine it houses because they sense this is a place that has been soaked in prayer over the centuries. We hold an annual diocesan pilgrimage during October, which is part of a season of thanksgiving for our Patron Saint known as Frideswidetide.

Visiting us

Thousands of tourists visit both College and Cathedral every year. We make an entrance charge which provides the visitor with a multimedia guide to the whole site, including a version tailored for families. You are welcome to book a ticket.

If you attend a parish church within the Diocese of Oxford, you may wish to apply for a Parishioner Pass which allows you into the Cathedral to pray (details on the next page).

We also offer tailored group visits to parishes.

A Parish Pilgrimage will usually include a guided tour of the Cathedral and the Chapter House and afternoon tea in the Great Hall followed by Choral Evensong. There is a charge for tea, but guided tours are free.

Volunteers

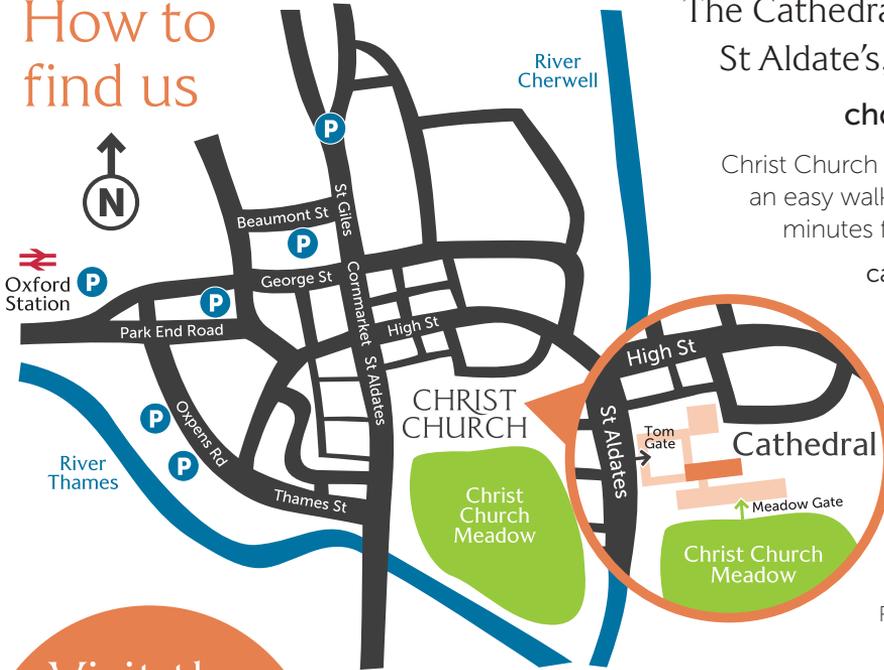
The Cathedral wouldn't be able to function without the help of its volunteers. Some volunteers are on a weekly rota helping each week, while others come in just a few times a year. They often help in the Cathedral during the week while continuing to worship in their parish church on Sundays.

For further information, please contact our Volunteer and Visitor Coordinator, Miranda Hockliffe (miranda.hockliffe@chch.ox.ac.uk) or 01865 286165.

Friends

You may also be interested in becoming a Friend of Christ Church Cathedral. The Friends raise funds to support the maintenance, restoration, repair, conservation and beautification of the Cathedral. See chch.ox.ac.uk/friends

How to find us



The Cathedral, Christ Church,
St Aldate's, Oxford OX1 1DP

chch.ox.ac.uk/find-us

Christ Church is located on St Aldates, an easy walk of no more than a few minutes from Oxford city centre.

cathedral@chch.ox.ac.uk
01865 276155



CHRIST CHURCH
CATHEDRAL

Registered charity in England and Wales number: 1143423

Visit the Cathedral with a Parishioner Pass

Members of the Church of England who live in the Diocese of Oxford are welcome to come to their Cathedral to pray whenever they wish.

The Parishioner Pass lets you enter the Cathedral (via Tom Gate) to pray and look around the building. If you would like to visit the College or the Great Hall you will need to buy a ticket (chch.ox.ac.uk/visit-us). Adults need a pass each. Under 18s will be admitted if they are accompanying a passholder.

To apply for a Parishioner Pass go to chch.ox.ac.uk/yourcathedral.

Alternatively please complete the form below and send it to us enclosing a passport sized photo and an SAE to Parishioner Pass, Christ Church Cathedral, St Aldate's Oxford OX1 1DP. Please allow ten days to process your application.



Title: First Name: Surname:

Address:

.....

..... Postcode:

The parish church I attend is

I declare that I am a member of the Church of England and live in the Diocese of Oxford and am eligible for a free Parishioner Pass.

Signature:

Find out more at chch.ox.ac.uk/cathedral and chch.ox.ac.uk/yourcathedral

In each edition of *Pathways*, we ask two Christians with different perspectives to explore a topical issue. When people join a church, they are not joining “The Society for Ancient Buildings”. So, is an old church building a blessing, or a millstone round our necks, sapping energy from churchwardens, the PCC and congregation?

Jesus made use of religious buildings. “I have always taught in synagogues and the temple” he said in John 18:20, and in Acts 3 and 4 it’s clear that the early apostles did the same. The Church throughout history has followed their example, and as a result we now have hundreds of buildings that bear witness to centuries of Christian faith. A gift from Christians in the past that can now be used to help people encounter Christ today. An asset, not a liability.

The first thing to do is simple: open the doors. I remember a church in another diocese, once isolated among fields but now at the centre of a small housing estate. It was kept locked for fear of vandalism, and opened only for monthly services. There was no noticeboard saying what it was, or giving any contact details or even the times of services. The churchwarden not surprisingly complained that attendance had dwindled to low single figures, that everyone was getting older and that closure was inevitable. But I can also think of other churches that, having

been in a similar position in the past, are now flourishing. Only a few weeks ago I went to a packed choral evensong in one of them.

*“Our buildings
are a precious
gift”*

Think of the different ways in which people approach church buildings. There are those who, armed with a book on the “thousand best churches,” visit them for their history and their architecture. There are local people who, though not regular churchgoers, come for weddings and funerals, at Christmas, and possibly for harvest festivals and on Remembrance Sunday.

And then there are people who we invite in, for concerts and events, for mother and toddler groups, for coffee, cake and companionship. And finally, of course, there is the most important group of all: the hesitant, the shy, the enquirers who do not feel able to make a public commitment to faith but who simply want to find somewhere safe and quiet to pray in the presence of God.



The Revd Canon Jeff West is Associate Priest of St Mary's, Banbury.

Jeff's article continues overleaf

[Kristina...]

A church building often lacks flexibility in how it can be used. If your needs change, the building can't easily be adjusted. It can be a welcoming place for the local community but more often than not local people may be reluctant to cross the threshold of what is perceived to be an intimidating building.

A building needs resources – resources that could be better spent on what really matters, on people within and outside of the church and their needs. Jesus came to “preach good news to the poor... to proclaim freedom for the prisoners” (Luke 4:18, NIV). How can we best fulfil our calling? A building can be an asset but when it becomes a burden, a millstone, it is time for a rethink.

I have moved again and am now part of a church that hires a modern church building from a trust – is this the best of both worlds? ¶

[Jeff...]

There was some interesting research carried out on the public's engagement with churches. A representative sample of the adult population was asked whether they had visited a place of worship during the previous year. 86% said that they had. 19% – almost one in five of the total population – said that they had done so ‘to find a quiet space’. 24% of those living in cities said that they were simply ‘walking past and felt the need to go in’. Other research asked visitors what they most wanted to find in a church. 69% said that there should be somewhere quiet to pray, and 66% that there should be flowers, a sign of a church cared for by a living, welcoming Christian community.*

There is a wealth of help and advice available for parishes who want to make their church building a place where people can be welcomed and Christ can be encountered. Our buildings are a precious gift. Let's make good use of them. ¶

**Research quoted dates back over a decade; more recent surveys on church buildings have not used these particular questions.*

Further reading

Some of the congregations in our diocese do not worship in church buildings. Out of a total of 812 churches, 18 congregations meet in a building that is not owned by the church (such as a school).



If you'd like to take a fresh look at the way your church building speaks to those outside the congregation, *A guide to experiencing God's presence in your church building* is a good place to start. With a useful checklist to assess features in and outside the church, it enables you to assess how welcoming the space is, and ways visitors can experience the blessing of a long-standing place of worship:

oxford.anglican.org/buildings

Sometimes congregations and parishioners unite to prevent a church falling into disrepair. Funds may be raised through community activities, where relationships can also flourish

and, through those relationships, the spiritual life of the church may be deepened.

There is excellent guidance available on the maintenance of church buildings:

- Churchcare: **churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings**
- Historic England: **historicengland.org.uk/advice/caring-for-heritage/places-of-worship/maintenance**
- The National Churches Trust: **nationalchurchestrust.org/regular-maintenance/maintenance-checklists-and-plans**
- The Society for Protection of Ancient Buildings: **spab.org.uk/news/maintaining-your-place-worship**
- The diocesan website: **oxford.anglican.org/church-buildings-guidance**

Addressing poverty and inequality

The imperative for Christian communities to engage in social action and social justice lies at the heart of our faith.

Each edition of *Pathways* explores one of five focus areas for our common life together. The focus areas aren't a description of all that our 812 churches are involved in, but they do represent the areas that we think God is currently calling us to pay particular attention to as we seek to become a more Christ-like Church.

The diocese has always prioritised issues of poverty and marginalisation. With churches embedded in every community across the Thames Valley, we're uniquely positioned to be alongside and with marginalised people; to hear their needs and to mobilise community-wide engagement.

Thinking about poverty

- It's easy to think that poverty is simply about income. It's actually a web of interlinked factors relating to economic position, material conditions and social relationships that together have a significant impact on an individual's ability to flourish.
- Issues of poverty intersect with a range of other inequalities, including race, gender, disability and class. The COVID-19 pandemic and the likely recession that will follow will only exacerbate existing inequalities across our diocese.
- Local context matters; there is no single model for community engagement. Parishes are influenced by how many in the local community are living on very low and insecure incomes and also by the level of economic inequality in their area.

A steering group formed just over a year ago aims to address specific questions of poverty and inequality. It has been good to have external representation from The Children's Society, Christians Against Poverty and Citizens Advice.

Turn over the page to find out more.



By engaging with our communities, dealing with the things on our doorstep that we can do something about and challenging unjust structures, we can begin to address issues of poverty and inequality. Here are just some of the resources and initiatives already in place:

Understanding poverty in our region

Addressing Poverty and Inequality: Supporting churches to love and serve their communities during COVID-19 and beyond is a new report available to download from our website. The report tells the story of poverty and inequality in a wide range of community and church contexts across the Thames Valley region.

Community engagement

We are investing £150,000 in community organising over a five-year period to establish civil society alliances for social justice in Reading and Oxford, to support action in rural contexts, and to join these with Citizens Milton Keynes to form Thames Valley Citizens. It's a long-term project that will help to challenge the underlying causes of poverty and take action for the common good.

Helping refugees

The Revd Liz Jackson, Associate Archdeacon of Berkshire, is leading an initiative to provide online structured language learning and employment skills training for Hongkongers arriving in Berkshire. Working together with the Chinese church in Reading, hundreds of people have asked for support with language learning, friendship and employment skills.

Transforming the gig economy

The gig economy provides essential income and opportunities to many. However, lacking protection from employment law or collective bodies, many platform workers face unfair and dangerous working conditions. The diocese has become a Fairwork supporter, joining with others to encourage the gig economy to make their organisations a fairer and safer place to work.

Discovering poverty in your area

In the first of a number of 'how-to' films to be produced in 2022, Emma Kennedy from Chipping Norton shares her top tips for churches looking to address poverty in their own context. Find it on our website at the address below.



To find out more about this focus area and the tools and funds to assist you, visit oxford.anglican.org/commonvision

Image: Shutterstock

Find out if your clothes are produced ethically and discover how to shop ethically and sustainably. directory.goodonyou.eco



Address poverty

Social action and social justice lie at the heart of our faith – in our Scriptures, our history, and in our deep longing to see the kingdom come. Here are ten things you can do right now.

1
Pray – The Trussell Trust has downloadable resources to help you pray for a hunger free future: trusselltrust.org

2
Watch *I, Daniel Blake* and *Sorry We Missed You* to learn about the benefits system and the gig economy.

3
Learn the signs of modern slavery. Know how to report anything suspicious: theclerwinitiative.org

4
Offer to buy food for someone experiencing homelessness. Ask how they are and link them to local services: streetlink.org.uk

5
Go without – try living on the asylum seeker weekly allowance. That's just £39.63pp for food, clothing and toiletries.

6
Commit to welcoming people who are seeking asylum or who are refugees. Get your church to join welcomechurches.org

8
Find out if your church and employer is paying the real living wage. Ask them to get accredited if not: livingwage.org.uk

9
Join in with local groups to campaign for social justice. Could your church be part of Citizens UK? Visit citizensuk.org

10
Volunteer your time (once or regularly) to an organisation or event addressing poverty or inequality in your area.

Nimbyism

With 17.5 million people in the UK affected by the housing emergency and living in overcrowded or unaffordable housing, why is the response to building affordable housing “not in my backyard”?

I live in a house that was built in the 1940s. It is built on land that was once a green field. Most of us live in houses that were once fields that our predecessors used to look over.

In this country we have a massive shortage of housing. Moreover, for decades housing for people who need support the most has not been built in enough numbers.

Local authorities are under pressure from central government to allocate land for housing within their Local Plans. In this diocese I believe the total planned number of new houses over the next ten years exceeds 200,000. Local authorities are also under pressure from developers to minimize the “affordable housing” element that should be provided within larger housing schemes, and regrettably most local authorities cave in. Housing associations simply don’t have enough funding or land to provide sufficient affordable housing to make up the shortfall.

Some people I speak to about this issue have a perception that those who live in affordable housing are the worst in society – there are likely to be behavioural issues if they live locally. As Christians, that just doesn’t wear. I am reminded of how Jesus responded to the question “Who is my neighbour?”

Actually, most people who live in affordable accommodation are like you and me. How many of our adult children in well paid jobs could afford to buy houses where we live? Many can’t even afford renting here.

So many villages don’t have the housing needed to enable people growing up there to continue

living in the village, or for the elderly to be able to downsize. For the community to thrive you need to have provision for the next generation.

Some of the local authorities are desperate to provide social housing, and approach landowners like the diocese directly. We then involve the local clergy, congregation and parish council in discussions. We don’t want to impose development but be part of the solution.

“You need to have provision for the next generation”

There are hardly any villages in our diocese where there is not housing need of some kind. Housing Needs Surveys identify how many families need support. In some cases we are only talking about two, three or four houses needed.

On occasions we’ve had strong support from a local authority for social housing on the edge of a village. Sadly, when we consulted with the local church we got the message: “We agree that the diocese should support affordable housing, but we don’t want it here.” That’s really hard to receive. I find myself thinking *What about your community?* The danger is that only the older generation will end up living in those villages, and some of the life of the community is lost.

As a diocese we particularly want to support Social Rented Affordable Housing – enabling people who have no hope of affording rent in our area to settle and be secure in a community. I am encouraged that many people see that as an important part of our vision for the future. But who is my neighbour? ¶

As told to Ruth Hamilton-Jones by David Mason, Director of Glebe and Buildings. Housing emergency data from Shelter. Page 19: data from a report to Bishop’s Council, Dec 2020

Social rent

There is a need for 5,767 new affordable houses per annum in the Diocese of Oxford. Of the need for the most affordable housing – Social Rented Affordable Housing – only 5% of the identified annual need (2,991) is being delivered.

Priority needs

There were 24,725 households on our local authorities' waiting list for affordable housing as of March 2019. Of these, 13,300 were classed as having a priority need where the local authority has a specified/ statutory duty to assist.

Temporary accommodation

1,830 households in our diocese were living in temporary accommodation in 2019 (a 138% increase from 2010). 1,280 of these households are families, 69% of which are single parents. This means at least 2,594 children living in temporary accommodation.

Racial inequality

There is a disproportionate level of housing need in BME communities. 48% of black households live in affordable housing nationally. Home ownership in the black population fell from 39% to 29% between 2011 and 2016.

What will they say?

Almshouses are the oldest form of social housing, with a 1,000-year history. When people look back to 2022, what will they say about how we welcomed the poor, the young, the oppressed and those who are less well off?



We will only navigate the challenges of the coming years if we learn to be a deeper church again. This year, we're encouraging everyone to explore what God is saying to us as a Church by dwelling on 1 Peter 1:13–2:11.

Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. ¹⁴ Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. ¹⁵ Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; ¹⁶ for it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

¹⁷ If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. ¹⁸ You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. ²⁰ He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. ²¹ Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.

²² Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. ²³ You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. ²⁴ For

"All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.
The grass withers,
and the flower falls,
²⁵ but the word of the Lord endures for ever."

That word is the good news that was announced to you.

Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. ² Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation –³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

⁴ Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and ⁵ like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For it stands in scripture:

"See, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

Due to space restrictions we have not been able to show the full passage. Please find the whole text at [oxford.anglican.org/dwelling](https://www.oxford.anglican.org/dwelling)

These verses are from the New Revised Standard version of the Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Dwelling in the Word

Reading aloud is powerful. For those of us fortunate to have been read to as children, it can evoke comfort and safety. Reading the text aloud is an important part of Dwelling in the Word.

In my last job I did a lot of driving and often listened to books. I recommend a reading of David Bentley Hart's translation of the New Testament. I was so moved by his version of Matthew's crucifixion scene that I once had to pull over before I could continue driving.

As we dwell in the Word over a period of months, consulting different translations can be helpful. Hart's version is excellent, but I also recommend the New Testament as translated by Oxford-based Jesuit, Nicholas King.

King's translation of our passage begins stirringly "gird up the loins of your mind". This is a reference to Proverbs 31:17. It's a strong image; we must be ready for what is ahead, which won't be some placid existence but the continuous activity of faithfulness. The whole passage is full of direct quotations and allusions to other parts of Scripture. It is likely that the author knew these by heart and incorporated them as he wrote - a reminder of the importance of learning texts by heart so that they become part of us. This is one of the ways in which Dwelling in the Word works.

Holiness

The first half of our text has holiness for its theme. Holiness has its origins in God who is holy, and the call to holiness in Leviticus is our charge. The author firmly roots that call in the person of Jesus before suggesting how a Christian community might exhibit holiness, entrenched in the Word in which we dwell.

Solid ground

The second part of our passage does not so much have a theme as a central image: stone, rock. Greek readers would have recognised that this is the meaning of the author's name. Try counting how many times the image is used in these verses. Standing on solid ground is something many of us yearn for amidst the shifting uncertainties of life and the times in which we live. Jesus is our only solid ground, the cornerstone that holds it all together. We have gone from being "No People" to being the "People of God". That's quite a claim.

"Jesus is our only solid ground"

The holy life is always grounded in Jesus. It is dwelling in his Word that transforms us, makes us holy. But never reaching that goal is also part of our calling. As Jim Cotter put it in one of his prayers:

"Give us the clarity to perceive such holiness in others,
And give us the sanity never to claim it for ourselves." ¶

(Unfolding the Word, Jim Cotter, Canterbury Press, 2012)

Words: Canon Richard Peers, Sub Dean of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford



Bishop Steven and bishops from around the world are rediscovering the medicine 1 Peter offers for today's church. Listen at blogs.oxford.anglican.org/podcast

A prayer for being me

Loving God, Creator of all,
I praise you that you create all things good,
and that this includes me.

Forgive me when I lose sight of the truth
that I am made in your image,
and allow the lies of the world
to push me into having a low view of myself,
and lose sight of the potential
of all that I am and all I can be in you.

Forgive me as well when I have too high a view of myself
and forget the truth
that I am most fulfilled when I am looking to you.

Through the power of your loving Holy Spirit,
Set me free to live in the abundance of life you give.
Guide me, guard me, equip me,
that I may worship you, serve those around me,
and faithfully steward your good creation
to the glory of your name.
Amen.

Too much time on social media can warp our perception of ourselves and impact our mental health. Pray for UK legislation this year that will better protect children and young people; minorities on the grounds of ethnicity, gender or religion; and those in public life. What could you do to reduce your screen time in the coming weeks? 🙏

*Prayer by Bishop Gavin
Photo: Shutterstock*



Bishop Steven has written extensively on artificial intelligence, unregulated technology firms and online harms. Find a selection of articles relating to these issues at blogs.oxford.anglican.org/tag/pathways-7

Abbot Stuart told me...



I was raised in the Anglican tradition and my mother was a committed Christian, something I recognised from a young age. Despite this, we only really attended church at festival times so I wouldn't have described myself as having a deep faith in Christ, rather that I lived within the wider Christian tradition and was part of the church community.

I feel that I have been on this Christian journey my whole life and that there have been many people who have inspired me and encouraged me along the way. However, one specific person had a particularly profound influence.

About ten years ago, when I went through a very difficult period in my life and took some time off to recover, I sought to re-examine my values and purpose and engaged more closely in what it meant to be a Christian. This led me to spend a short period of time on retreat at Mucknell

Abbey, an Anglican Benedictine community in Worcestershire. There I met Abbot Stuart.

The retreat granted the opportunity for me to reflect deeply, which I didn't feel I had done before. In conversations with Abbot Stuart, I was able to discover and gain the confidence to call myself a Christian and begin to live accordingly. Both of my parents were academics and as a result this meant I had spent much of my life over-analysing the basis for what it meant to be a Christian. This had almost become a barrier to me taking the step to commit to a personal relationship with Jesus.

Abbot Stuart helped me discern that personal faith is not something I needed to over-analyse. I learned that if I felt comfortable that I was in a dialogue with God then I was already in a personal relationship with him.

Since this time, my faith has come alive. Opportunities to invest time in helping other people have helped me to understand what it means to be a Christian. The catalyst for this was when I was asked to chair the Archbishop of Canterbury's Task Group on Responsible Credit and Savings.

As many say, it is easy to see the hand of God at work when looking back. I find it encouraging to see how God has brought certain people into my life at different stages, right when I needed it, and how he always seems to bring things together in the end.

As told to Pathways by Sir Hector Sants. Sir Hector was recently appointed Chair of the Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance.

Photo: Steven Buckley



Who told you? is our ongoing series of stories from Christians about coming to faith and the people who helped them along the way. Share your story with us: communications@oxford.anglican.org

COME AND SEE

Answering deep questions of faith

Come and See returns for Lent 2022. It's our big open invitation to ask deep questions of faith. Join us.

oxford.anglican.org/come-and-see