

Giving life to our churches

What does ministry look like where you are? Does it look the same as it did five years ago? In Bath and Wells we have been encouraging the bubbling up of a variety of ministries – lay and ordained – as we seek to release the gifts of all and, in the process, help to give life to the Church.

Suse Osmond, Vicar of St Mary's Bridgwater says, "Everybody has a gift to bring to their church and when people are encouraged to use those gifts that's when church works best. There are a million and one things that I am not gifted with and welcome those with the gifts to support me - we all need others to support us."



Revd Suse (right) with Bishop Michael and St Mary's cafe volunteers.

In St Mary's, Suse has been challenging the perception that only the vicar can lead worship by encouraging others in small ways; asking others to lead Café Church worship, think of creative ways to pray, or a develop a theme for a particular service. Those blessed with other gifts are also recognised including café volunteers, who offer pastoral care not just a hot drink, and a church member with a passion for positive mental health who is being encouraged to explore ways the church can offer a combination of mental health and

spiritual support.

Says Revd Suse, "We can be nervous about starting something new as we feel we don't have enough people but I have found that if you step out in faith the support can come. In times of crisis, for example when we wanted to support Ukrainian refugees, the community has heard our story and stepped in to help. We have also found volunteers on websites such as Spark Somerset. One volunteer, who ended up joining our congregation, has since volunteered her gifts to become our new PCC Secretary."

Want to encourage a conversation about what church looks like where you are? Find the resources at bathandwells.org.uk/enabling-ministries ■

News in brief

Everyone, everywhere growing in faith

People throughout Bath and Wells are exploring growing in faith in the first week of February in our Everyday Faith event.

The event started with a Zoom service on Sunday 29 January and every day during the week people are exploring the themes of Growth, Rhythms, Others, Word, Together and Hope before taking the opportunity to come together on Saturday, 4 February. You can still sign up during the week of the event and access the resources when the week is over.

[Find out more at bathandwells.org.uk/everyday-faith-event](https://bathandwells.org.uk/everyday-faith-event) ■



Ringing in the changes

A set of church bells from St Peter and St Paul's, North Curry are the first to be cast with the new cypher of King Charles III. The community raised £150,000 for the bells to be recast and some have visited the foundry to witness the recasting, including the church's vicar, the Revd Simon Bale. He says, "To see the bells actually poured into the cast is quite something. It's quite emotional, frankly. I was able to say a prayer of thanksgiving and of hope and gratitude as well for all this being done." The bells won't return to Somerset until later in the year ■

Threads through Creation

Bath Abbey is hosting 'Threads through Creation', a stunning exhibition of twelve enormous, embroidered silk panels that explore the story of Creation.

Inspired by the verses of Genesis, the first book in the Bible, textile artist Jacqui Parkinson re-imagines this ancient story in a vibrant combination of layers of silk, hand-dyed materials, metallic leathers and gold leaf, miles of thread – and more than eight million stitches! The exhibition opened in January and will run until 19 March ■



A better way

By Michael Beasley, Bishop of Bath and Wells

Culture, it's said, is 'how things get done around here'. This suggests that our understanding of the world is largely formed by our experiences and what we're accustomed to. That's all fine until everything around us, as it does, keeps on changing. Then we're then set on a collision course between how we think things should be, and how they actually are. Anybody aged over 40 who's had to ask a nine year old how to use their new phone will understand this dilemma perfectly.

Cultural collisions aren't just restricted to technology. They affect churches too. Many of us grew up with a model of church set up by the Victorians. This mostly meant that each parish had one

church building with its own vicar, who took responsibility for most aspects of the ministry needed in a particular place. Yet even this was new in its day. Look much further back and things worked very differently. The New Testament speaks of churches where lots of different people played many different roles, each operating out of the particular skills and gifts given them by God. In Ephesians the writer describes a church where 'some [are] apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers'.

So what would be the right model of church for our day? The Victorians' assumption that the vicar would do almost everything would seem to be a crying waste of the gifts and passions that together

we share. And as more of our clergy care for three, six or more parishes, the nineteenth century model is increasingly leaving our vicars tired, overstretched and liable to burn out.

We need a better way; one that draws on the rich talents, abilities and skills that our church members have. Here in Bath and Wells we're calling this 'shared local ministry'. Examples of what that can look like exist in many places around our diocese. Neither first century nor nineteenth century, but an emerging twenty first century way of how we want 'to get things done around here'. A better way to inhabit well the faith we've inherited in our time and generation.

Bishop Michael ■

'We can do it'

Julian Spicer is one of nine Lay Worship Assistants licensed in Quantock Towers benefice last year.

What made you all train up?

We had advance notice of our rector retiring and as churchwardens are practical problem-solving people and knew, post-Covid, how important it is for people to have confidence that we are maintaining our normal service pattern. We went out and asked our congregations who would like to join us and train up and in total nine of us trained up, including five churchwardens.

How did you find the training?

It was only four Saturday mornings, with just 11 people in total from our deanery, so it felt very comfortable. We felt there was a real benefit in us all taking the same training and getting a common grounding, even though churchwardens can already take services if needed.



Julian Spicer (back row, left) and his fellow LWAs were licensed in March.

Have you enjoyed being an LWA?

I think some people have found it a growth experience. They feel they really have moved on from one place to another place and we are all very happy to carry on doing services when we have a vicar back. We also have two more people in training so we will soon have 11 LWAs which is great.

Are you looking forward to having a vicar back?

There is a bit of a sense of 'we've proved we can do it but don't want to do it on our own forever'. It will be nice not to have to worry about finding someone to take a christening, for example.

Have you got any advice for someone considering training to be an LWA?

There is a real satisfaction in getting on with the role. If you feel it is something you want to do and would like to do, then it probably is something you could do as in some way it is a kind of self-selecting role. Read more about Julian's experience of being an LWA, including establishing a nationwide Facebook groups for LWAs: [bathwells.anglican.org/quantock-lwa](https://www.bathwells.anglican.org/quantock-lwa)

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