

Peacebuilding network

Purpose, background and accountability

This is a network, developed to support parishes across the Diocese of Bath and Wells.

Purpose of network

The network aims to offer trained volunteers to assist parishes who find themselves having to confront uncomfortable differences or disagreement which threaten the harmony of the congregation or community.

Background

The church is in a state of transition in which our capacity to deal positively with difference will be highly significant. Covid forced us to suspend many traditional patterns of parish life and find new ways of “being church”. At the same time other external pressures require us to think differently about the future - the ageing demographics of church membership, changes to clergy deployment and parish structures, new patterns of church activity and worship. Equally, the fact that people will hold different views about how these things should be addressed has the potential to be a source of tension. And the church is, of course, not immune from the wider social currents of intolerance and polarisation sometimes present in public discourse.

In the recent past Bath and Wells offered a modest support service to parishes who found themselves in difficulties as a result of tensions arising from differences. Often, though, people call for help only after relationships have deteriorated or when disagreements have escalated into conflict.

In order to expand the support we can offer, and make it available sooner, we have started to build a new team of skilled volunteers to work with parishes to embrace differences more successfully. This small network is beginning to develop a coherent approach, learning from and supporting each other.

Accountability

The network operates under the authority of the Archdeacons, with the Diocesan Adviser on Peacebuilding holding responsibility for the development of materials and approaches.

- The Diocesan Adviser will be responsible for finalising any materials produced.
- When operating in parishes or with individuals, the network will be accountable to the relevant archdeacon, with Simon Keyes also kept informed.
- Where a parish or individual makes contact with the network directly, the Diocesan Adviser will liaise with the relevant Archdeacon to agree the network's involvement.

The Diocesan Adviser

In April 2021, Bishop Ruth appointed Simon Keyes, a member of St John the Baptist in Frome and a Visiting Professor of Reconciliation and Peacebuilding at the University of Winchester, to lead this initiative.

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