



CONNECTIONS

Welcome to the latest edition of Connections. The stories in this newsletter show how parishes are engaging in mission and ministry contributing to our vision and priorities.



ALPHA COURSE

WEST SWINDON AND LYDIARD TREGOZ PARTNERSHIP

The Alpha course, which invites people to explore what the Christian faith means for them, has recently introduced The Alpha Film Series and Youth Film Series to engage with new people attending the sessions.

Among those making use of the new film series were members of the four churches which make up the West Swindon and Lydiard Tregoz Partnership.

Wendy Deverell, who ran the course, said Alpha was an ideal way of connecting with those coming along wanting to find out more about Christianity.

She said: "There is still a place for Alpha. The latest videos, which have been put together by Holy Trinity Brompton for the course, are much more relevant and have kept it fresh.

"They beauty of it is that it is a multi-purpose course that is not just for non-Christians; we had a range of people taking part, from those preparing for Baptism and confirmation to people

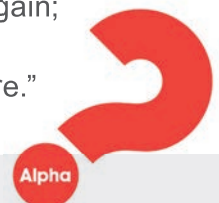


with no church background and ones who had been brought up in a Christian family."

Wendy added that the course also helped to create connections between the four churches, as members from each congregation took part and invited family, friends and colleagues along.

She said: "As the congregations are based across four churches, it meant that we were able to build relationships and brings us together as a church family.

"We'd not run an Alpha course for a few years but we had 16 people come along to this course. We've already had enquiries about when we are going to run it again; there is clearly a thirst among people to want to find out more."



WHAT NEXT?

- Alpha is easy to run and can be tailored to your context and has four different video formats as well as resources to deliver the talks yourselves. The Alpha Film Series and Youth Film Series are the latest, most accessible formats, and are ideal for engaging younger generations.
- Find resources to help support and run an Alpha course at www.alpha.org.



MESSY CHURCH ST CHRISTOPHER'S BRISLINGTON

One challenge facing churches is how to provide services that engage with families and which are fun and creative.

Alison Paginton, the regional co-ordinator for the Bristol region, has been running Messy Church at St Christopher's Brislington since 2009.

She said that, when done well, Messy Church should reflect the messiness of life.



Alison said: ***"Messy Church is Church. It is not just a fix and it is not just for kids; it is about building a church family."***

"If it is done well, it can be a brilliant outreach to the community. It is about being hospitable and making people want to come back. It is about using people's gifts."

The key to running a successful Messy Church is to be open to the needs and talents of those coming along, rather than imposing anything on people, said Alison.

"You have to be prepared to change and move things around," she added. "As we developed at St Christopher's, it was important to focus on what the group wanted to do.

"The key for us is to ensure that activities include everybody, whatever their age. By getting people to use their gifts – whatever that may be – we created an inclusive environment.

"We offer a place in the church building to display what everybody has contributed – not just the children – to create a sense of pride and achievement."

WHAT NEXT?

- You can find resources and learn more about setting up, running and developing a Messy Church at www.messychurch.org.uk.



SEASON OF INVITATION DRAYCOT BENEFICE, CHIPPENHAM

Most people would not now come to church without an invitation from a friend – even if they had attended in the past. And most Christians aren't extending that invitation.

Creating a culture of invitation is an essential way of helping Christians get into a habit of inviting friends and family to church, church events and the Christian community.

A Season of Invitation resources are one way in which members of Draycot Benefice have been responding to the challenge.

As well as running two training sessions to encourage the ministry team to respond, the Revd Alison Love, Priest in Charge of the benefice, has been asking the congregations in her sermons to consider how they could invite others along to the church.

Alison said: "I focused on the fact that doing the inviting is the success for us – the response to the invitation is between the invited person and God. We need to remember that Paul planted, Apollos watered and God gave the growth.

"We have also used our small - but growing - benefice choir as a focus for encouraging invitation; producing invitations for the choir members and congregations to give to others to invite them to come and listen to the choir singing, at which ever of our five churches they are at."

Three out of four Christians know who they would invite to church if they were prompted to do so.

Resources available through A Season of Invitation encourage and support invitations to a series of five accessible services from the autumn (Back to Church Sunday, Harvest and Remembrance) to Advent and Christmas, helping create a culture which encourages church members to take a step and invite somebody – whatever the response.

WHAT NEXT?

- There are lots of resources to help support this season and the creation of a culture of invitation at www.unlockingthegrowth.com.



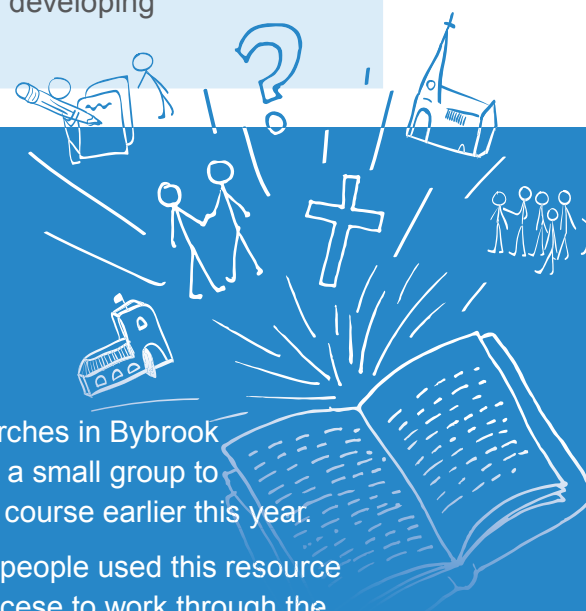
CREATING CONNECTIONS: LENT COURSE BYBROOK, CHIPPENHAM

Small groups are a great chance in the life of the church for people to share the opportunities and challenges they face in following Christ in all of life.

They can provide a mix of reading the Bible and praying together; supportive and challenging relationships; and space to share experiences that brings faith and real life together.

Members of the churches in Bybrook gathered together in a small group to take part in the Lent course earlier this year.

At each session, 12 people used this resource produced by the Diocese to work through the course and to share their ideas. Alison Flint, LLM with the Bybrook Team, said the group had enjoyed studying the Bible together.



Alison said: "With a smaller number of people, you are able to focus on the needs of the group. We were also able to consider things in more detail.

"Everybody trusted one another and give their honest thoughts on each part of the course we were studying."

"Everyone has their own point of view and was able to bring something different to the group. It made them think about things differently.

"It was a very interesting course and we had some very interesting discussions. I would recommend similar courses to other churches."

WHAT NEXT?

- Disciplekit offers a variety of discipleship resources for groups from different publishers, all reviewed and rated to save you time. The website has links to resources aimed at adults, youth and children – for those who are enquiring about Christianity, beginning the Christian journey, or growing along the way. www.disciplekit.org
- The 'Creating connections' discipleship course is now available online at www.bristol.anglican.org.



GROWING LEADERS ST MICHAEL'S STOKE GIFFORD, BRISTOL

As people learn to serve and follow Christ, they will be looking for practical opportunities to use their gifts; to be mentored and coached in developing their skills further; and to be released into acts of service, not simply in their own church, but out into the community and the wider world.

The CPAS Growing Leaders course allows people to explore the foundations of their character as they identify and develop the skills that God has given them.

Members of ten churches from across the Kingswood and South Glos Deanery have been gathering together at St Michael's Stoke Gifford once a month to take part in the year-long course.

Each of the 38 participants has been assigned a mentor to help guide them through a project over the 12 months.

The Revd Simon Jones, vicar at St Michael's and Area Dean for Kingswood and South Glos, said it was important to ensure that people were given the space to develop their gifts.

He said: "Leadership development is one of the key priorities for the Diocese as part of the Creating connections vision; therefore, we need to be intentional about developing people's gifts.

"Leadership is always a mix of what you learn by experience and what you can glean from others. The Growing Leaders course has both of those strands.

"It is exciting to think of 38 people developing their gifts as they serve within churches, communities and the wider world."

WHAT NEXT?

- Find out more about the Growing Leaders course at www.cpas.org.uk.
- Consider how your church can invest in developing gifts to help people better serve the Church and the wider community.
- You can find additional resources for developing gifts in your church – including 'How to...' guides and Exploring Christianity - at www.bristol.anglican.org.

If you have any feedback, questions or would like to submit a story for inclusion in the Connections newsletter, please contact Ben Evans at the diocesan office on 0117 906 0100, or email ben.evans@bristoldiocese.org

Thank you!

