

Healthy Churches 2025



COLOUR MY CHURCH, 2025



HOW HEALTHY IS YOUR CHURCH?

Rev Clive Hicks, Healthy Church Development Enabler

In the questions posed by our Archdeacons to churches across the Diocese in 2024, key leaders responded to - **"how would you rate the health of your church at present?"** - on a scale from 'really struggling' (0) to 'thriving' (5). There were 119 responses. Nobody marked this as '5'; 31% said '4' - which sounds like they are encouraged. 44% were neutral ('3'); 25% marked this as 1 or 2, or gave no response. If we are *glass half empty* some of us might say nearly 70% are neutral or worse; only 31% are happy with their church's health; the *glass half full* minded will say that 75% are OK or better. Other responses showed that what gave the greatest joy and new life emerging, were:

- Spiritual and numeric growth, the involvement of children & families, strong community links, effective clergy, the quality of fellowship and numbers of new attendees, gave the optimists grounds for more hope;
- All age worship, then links with church and non-church primary schools, along with toddler groups, were where connections with children and families seemed to be fostered in the healthiest contexts, but only 25% of churches were resourcing and supporting the faith of children, young people and families;
- The strongest community links were based on Foodbanks, Lunch Groups and Cafes, Schools Work, Toddler groups and special Festival services accounted for two thirds of mentions;
- Understandably, the main priorities for churches were Outreach, and especially Outreach to children and youth, Spiritual Growth and Improved Links with the community;
- There are efforts to connect with those new to faith in 62% of churches - Alpha, Christianity Explored, Pilgrim, and the development of new worshipping communities in various forms;
- 50% of Parish Safeguarding Officers had been in post for five years or less, so it is encouraging that people are helping to make all our churches safe spaces, and there's still room to learn more via Diocesan training programmes;
- The financial health of our churches is understandably quite varied, with just 23% scoring 4 or above; 29% neutral; and 41% scoring 2 or lower.

The graphic (left) shows some of the areas I've developed a concern to see addressed in our churches - **Red** (missional, outreach), **Green** (thinking, strategy) and **Blue** (spirituality, wellbeing). I am hopeful that similar factors remain high in the awareness and concern of many more of us, as we pray and plan for healthier churches; above all, pray for hope-filled, healthy church cultures.



AD = Area Dean; C = Clergy; H = Headteacher; EH – Executive Head; HoS = Head of School

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p>For more than a decade, our Diocese has been challenged by, and released, to be healthy churches not purely by giving attention to the eight essential qualities, but the underlying Trinitarian Compass (blue, red, green), with an aspiration for healthy churches which exhibit balance and mutual recognition of diverse gifts, interests and spiritualities; this remains our prayer once again in 2025.</p>					<p><i>Healthy Churches</i></p> <p>Prayerful Congregations & intercessors</p>	<p>1</p> <p>SOUTHAM DEANERY AD Andy Batchelor</p>
<p>3rd BEFORE LENT 2 The Bridges Group, links with Arc School C IN VACANCY</p>	<p>3 Bishop's Council (3rd) Diocesan Trustees (4th)</p>	<p>4 St Lawrence' CofE Primary School, Napton-on-the-Hill H Bethan Hanna</p>	<p>5 Bishop's Itchington & Radford Semele C Martin Green</p>	<p>6 Radford Semele CofE Primary School H Katie Benson</p>	<p>Healthy Churches 7 Fresh efforts, outdoors, with people where they are – "healthy streetlife"</p>	<p>8 Healthy Churches For all Spiritual Companions and Pilgrims across the Diocese</p>
<p>2nd BEFORE LENT 9 For wider communities across Southam Deanery – farms, businesses</p>	<p>10 The Offchurch Group C IN VACANCY, advertising 0.5 position</p>	<p>11 Long Itchington & Marton C Richard Suffern</p>	<p>12 Long Itchington CofE Primary School H Rebecca Richards</p>	<p>13 <i>Healthy Churches</i> Appreciation of all artists, actors and musicians as they enrich churches and communities.</p>	<p>Healthy Churches 14 How many new people are we praying for, to join not just attend?</p>	<p>15 <i>Healthy Churches</i> For mission plans to be developed in each and every parish</p>
<p>3rd BEFORE LENT 16 Harbury, Ladbroke, & Ufton, with Chesterton C Andy Batchelor</p>	<p>17 Harbury CofE Primary School H Lucy Bosley</p>	<p>18 Southam C Vikki Bisiker</p>	<p>19 St James's CofE Primary School, Southam H Laura Richards</p>	<p>20 <u>Bishop's Core Staff Team</u></p>	<p>Healthy Churches 21 Do we appreciate what might help connect with people who love nature?</p>	<p>22 <i>Healthy Churches</i> Is your church an Eco Church yet? Pray for this in 2025.</p>
<p>2nd BEFORE LENT 23 Mission hubs in 6 parts of the Diocese: Alcester, Bedworth, Coventry (2), Leamington, Rugby</p>	<p>24 Mission Hub Associate Ministers, especially those newer in post</p>	<p>25 For wider communities across Southam Deanery – social and medical care</p>	<p>26 For wider communities across Southam Deanery – leisure and retail outlets</p>	<p>Healthy Churches 27 For a growing awareness of the potential of every church to find ways to grow</p>	<p>Healthy Churches 28 Leading Your Church into Growth – to enable 15 in 5 new churches to take part in 2025.</p>	

PRAYER DIARY

"God offers himself in total love to each one of us. Our part is to open our hearts to receive the gift."
Ruth Burrows, OCD

Healthy Churches
The heart of the gospel is the wonder of God's love in Christ evidenced in his coming into our world in the context of poverty and in his dying at the hands of a brutal torturing regime.
Robert Warren in *Developing Healthy Churches*

BEING HEALTHY CHURCH: BALANCE
In her book, *The Serviceberry: an economy of gifts and abundance* (2024, Allen Lane), Robin Wall Kimmerer says the fruit tree is an antidote to the broken relationships and misguided goals of our times, and reminder that 'hoarding won't save us, all flourishing is mutual.'

SPECIFIC DAYS IN FEBRUARY 2025

1 – Southam Deanery. We hope to run a Deanery Alpha course at Harbury this year.

2 - The Bridges Group – for developing links with a local school for special needs, Arc School. St Lawrence Church and Arc School, Napton. As a representative of our church (during vacancy), Helen Eadon was invited by the Arc School to help with their understanding of Christian worship. The pupils have been welcomed into the church to explore (everywhere!) and share specific Christian festivals; Harvest and Christmas so far. As the local place of worship with wonderful history and natural resources, the church has a lot to offer alongside other local places of interest. Supporting these children is both different and very rewarding. Helen also popped along to their School Christmas Fayre to share a 'Messy' approach to the Christmas story (Rev Andy Batchelor was there too) through Lego and the church's new knitted nativity set. Glad to say, more is planned! R (PTO) – Peter Jackson.

5 - Bishops Itchington & Radford Semele links with RSPS are very good, with regular assemblies and visits, and supportive help with moving the school and church forward. The new reunion youth group for the school leavers is going well, thanks to help from Thrive .. it's just very noisy :) Links with school at Bishops are growing again too, even though it's not a church school, and hopes for further developments, especially with KS1 ...

10 - The Offchurch Group We thank God for the continuing success of Messy Church, the pulling together to keep the Group going and the breaking even financially for 2024. We pray for God to bring the right leader to us in 2025. R Richard Spicer; R (PTO) Jackie Brown.

11 - Holy Trinity Long Itchington and St Esprit, Marton. We would like to give thanks for an encouraging SIAMS report on the School and for the increasingly close links between the School and Church, especially with the new weekly 'Open The Book' team's visits to conduct Collective Worship and with *Crossteach*; also for a new Deanery Youth Fellowship, and Bible studies in the pub which will soon involve a Lent Course. R (PTO) – Terry Morris.

16 – Harbury, Ladbroke and Ufton, with Chesterton - Chesterton church are now part of the Harbury, Ladbroke, and Ufton group, so prayers for that parish as they adjust to this new season, and for us all as we work together to minister in these communities. We have an excellent relationship with our local school and engage in some way every week with the children, their teachers and parents. R – Julie Batchelor

18 – St James, Southam – We give thanks for the amazing opportunities to join with community life. Ranging from bug hunting in the churchyard to being part of the Warwickshire Open Studios and Southam Arts Trail; and from supporting SEND families to raising vital funds with events such as music concerts. There is never a dull moment here! *Prayers please as we embark upon a massive repair and renovation project on our beautiful Grade 1 listed building so that generations to come can celebrate church and community life together.*

24 – Mission Hub Associate Ministers Eleanor Jeans (St Paul's, Leamington Spa), Daniel Corlett (Alcester Minster), Erin Gilmour (The Bridge, Coventry), Ugo Okeke & Dave Jones (All Saints, Bedworth), Alison Baxter (St Andrew, Rugby) and Kate Pellereau (St Laurence's, Foleshill, Coventry).

R = Reader



Merciful Trinity, by Caritas Müller

The

Ruth Burrows says of this image: "Can we believe that God comes so close, is so bound up with us as this image reveals? ... the centre one is the focus of the other three. Within that circle lies helpless 'man'. The divine Trinity comes down to his aid, the Father gently lifting him up ... the Son kneels to kiss his dirty, crippled feet delighting in being his servant; as a dove in flames, the Spirit, mutual love of Father and Son, swoops down to complete 'man's' enfolding into the unspeakable glory of the triune life.' in *Quis ut Deus*

PRAYER JOTTINGS – FEBRUARY 2025



Ruth Burrows OCD (Sister Rachel) died just over twelve months ago – on 10 November 2023, aged 100. She had entered a Carmelite monastery in Derbyshire aged 18, and for 82 years she was an enclosed Carmelite nun; for more than 60 years she was in a monastery in Norfolk. It was said of her in a tribute from her Catholic Diocese,

“One felt that not only did she know the Gospels, but that she lived them. Following Jesus in her every-day and humdrum life was essential to her and encouraging others to do the same was the mainstay of her existence.” **Her books will offer us insights on spirituality and prayer for a few months.**

Some of Ruth Burrows’s books: *Guidelines for Mystical Prayer* (1976, Continuum) *Essence of Prayer* (2006, Bloomsbury); *Love Unknown* (2011, Bloomsbury) – the latter was Rowan Williams, then Archbishop of Canterbury’s Lent book, in 2012.

- From *Essence of Prayer*, Chapter 1, **Some Reflections on Prayer**
Starting off on the right foot ‘What do we mean by prayer? What does the word mean in the Christian context?’ She says we almost always talk about prayer as something **we** do; this needs to be corrected. ‘Our Christian knowledge assures us that prayer is essentially what *God* does, how God addresses us, looks at us. It is not primarily something we are doing to God ... but what God is doing for us.’ (p. 1) And, she continues, ‘It is not something we are doing to God, something we are giving to God but what God is doing for us. And what God is doing for us is giving us the divine Self in love.’

God – or ego? ‘we must realise that what we have to do is allow ourselves to be loved, to be there for Love to love us. True prayer means wanting God not ego. We have to recognize that a great deal that goes for interest in and longing for prayer is a subtle form of self-seeking. To give ourselves seriously to prayer is to recognize this and face up to the choice it presents: we will cast aside our egotism, allow God’s love to purify it more and more whatever the cost, or we camouflage it, give it other, more spiritual names ... The thing to do is, of course, to get down to praying! That will answer our questions.’ (p. 3, 4)

Get out of the boat; walk on the waters with Jesus ‘We have to be willing to let go of our own criterion of what prayer is and what growth in the Spirit might mean. There are all sorts of ways of praying and there are books galore to direct us on them; yet these, at bottom, keep us in the boat.’ (p. 4) ‘Real prayer lets go of the controls ... Most of us see this as an unfortunate occurrence that must never be repeated, and so we refit our boat, and improve our sailing skills to ensure that we have control once more.’ (p. 5)

She then quotes this prayer of Julian of Norwich,

God of Thy goodness, give me Thyself: for Thou art enough to me, and I may nothing ask that is less that may be full worship to Thee: and if I ask anything that is less, ever me wanteth – but only in Thee I have all.
from Revelations of Divine Love, ch. 5

Bob Dudley, from the *Diocesan Spiritual Formation Group* shares this favourite quote from Ruth Burrows, **Prayer is essentially God’s work. Our part is to give time, do our best to keep attention, surrender ourselves as best we can. Then we can be sure that God works. Faith does not ask for signs, for tokens. When we really grasp that prayer is essentially God’s business, not ours, we will never talk of failure, no matter how unsatisfactory prayer seems to us.**

One of our Church Schools; a request for prayer. Mr Timothy Dale takes up his post as new Headteacher at Loxley CofE Primary School on 1 January 2025. Tim is currently Acting Assistant Headteacher at another of our CofE schools – Holy Trinity in Stratford.

- The prayer theme this month is **Healthy Churches**. *Coming up – the Themes for the next 3 months will be: Lent and Easter (March, April) and New Worshipping Communities (May).* *Do consider sending me your prayer suggestions, and any other jottings*
- Each month **we focus on a different Deanery;** *in February we are praying for Southam Deanery, it will be Rugby in March, then Alcester in April, and Fosse Deanery in May. I look forward to receiving updates from area deans and clergy, and anyone else with specific prayer requests.*

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