

Healthy Churches Development – Update 6, March 2025

It is a new year, and my own workplan was confirmed and is being carried forward this quarter. I will be contributing within a wider presentation at Diocesan Synod this month.

1 - Developing best practice with frameworks for **evaluating the health of churches**. The NCD surveys are still available, but the plan this year is to formulate new ways to capture the health of churches, especially in mission and ministry, in a more discursive and reflective style.

2 - Going beyond **the Leading Your Church Into Growth (LyCiG) pilot**, to involve more churches. There are currently 16 places (for 5 churches), but this could be expanded further if the demand is strong enough. Churches are also very welcome to self-fund, but it is around £800 for three places.

3 - Sharing know-how to build healthier churches - in vacancy, visioning and culture change. The intention is to consolidate a set of resources and offerings in these areas of church life.

4 – Supporting or conducting interventions in consultation with Area Deans and Mission Hub leaders. Making more of my availability to support needed culture change in benefices and churches.

5 - How can the Diocese **build on the heritage of RED-BLUE-GREEN streams**, within the principles of Natural Church Development. My workload is structured around these areas:-

Red e.g. **Leading Your Church into Growth** - LyCiG – is moving into Year 2 of a pilot phase, with more than 20 clergy and lay teams having attended the June and October conferences in 2024. There are places on two more conferences in 2025 – June (at Northampton) and October (back at Swanwick), for which 16 funded places are now available; **invitations to participate will be sent out in March 2025**. Kate Mier (Arden Marches) posted a story on the Diocesan website speaking of her intentional engagement with NCD surveys gift-based workshops and latterly LyCiG. [Leading your Church into Growth](#)

Blue e.g. **Passionate Spirituality** – engagements with spiritual accompaniment, contemplative spirituality and study continue; I spoke at a session for the Spiritual Formation Group on ‘Gardens as Landscapes’ in November, and I am scheduled to be involved with rural church leaders this year. I enjoy playing cello with the growing Dwell worship team in the Bridge Mission Hub, playing in the band for City Prayer and Praise West (February 2025). I am currently picking up interest from churches wanting to establish spirituality focused strands to their ministry and mission.

Green e.g. **Establishing relationships with new people**, in the outdoors and streets of our communities. I joined a learning community with Steve Aisthorpe and others – *Faith in Nature* – at Abernethy Kilmalieu, Scotland, and we meet online again in February 2025. I have developed some additional strands to this body of ‘catalyst’ ideas, suited to away days, engagements by individuals and small groups. These relate to the spectrum of gardens/parkland and landscapes, as well as a set of ideas around “healthy streetlife” shared in Diocesan communications in February 2025.

Sample of images of Parcevall Hall, Yorkshire Dales, from my presentation, ‘Gardens as Landscapes’



THE OTHER PAGE SHOWS HOW I SEE MY WORK FROM THREE DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES – INDIVIDUALS/GROUPS (THE ‘GARDEN’), CHURCHES AND BENEFICES (THE ‘PARKLAND’) AND THE WIDER WORLD (THE ‘LANDSCAPE’) >>>

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Heart work/GARDENS: 1-to-1 links with individuals - I engage in a variety of more informal ways, including networking, with representatives of churches anywhere in the Diocese and support MDR for some individual clergy – hopefully building trust and possibilities for partnering in the near future. I offer spiritual accompaniment for a small number of people within the Diocesan scheme, and can offer one-to-one support in many other ways, too. Typically, I meet informally with 2-3 church leaders for a coffee each month, to listen and encourage! **Training & learning for groups** – Interactive sessions help explore new opportunities for church health, including with Deanery Chapters, with curates (December 2024) – this extends to PCCs and other groups for whom Healthy Church may be a focus at any point in the year. I am happy to speak at Deanery gatherings on *Healthy Churches*, as invited.

FOR INDIVIDUALS AND SMALL GROUPS: NCD Character Guides – the international ‘discipleship resources’ within the NCD programme have been re-branded – they link back with the series of books on Spirituality, Ministry (Gifts), Community (including small groups), Leadership and now Love. The *Passionate Spirituality* resource helps recognize that within any church/parish there is likely to be a wide range of individuals with different spiritual preferences, which of course is a gift in thinking more creatively about new worshipping communities. [NCD Life - Individual Character Tests](#). **There is now a complete set of online tests within the family – I am making Spirituality and the NEW Wholeness tests available through tokens (value £5-6 per person) which can be requested for individuals and small groups.**

Collective Action/PARKLAND: Visioning & Away Days for congregations – attending, contributing, designing, facilitating different options are available for working with churches, parishes and benefices. Sessions have been based on the rewilding theme, on NCD survey results, linked with a movie or video clips (*The Wild Gardener*, *The Biggest Little Farm (on Apple+)*, *Riverwoods (available on My 5)*, *The Boy Who Planted a Forest*, and Jean Giono’s short story ‘*The Man Who Planted a Forest*’); developing networks of small churches - these can be practical and visionary, analytical and creative, depending on your requirements. I am usually able to schedule work in at three months’ notice; I may be able to advise or co-produce sessions at shorter notice. **Vacancies in church leadership** – I do some work in partnership with churches in vacancy, as directed by Barry Dugmore, Archdeacon Missioner; churches in Fosse, Rugby, Coventry East and Coventry North deaneries most recently. It may include ministry and preaching (which continues to have a healing and prayer ministry dimension), consultancy and facilitation work, and as required, shaping refreshed Parish Profiles. A series on ‘being Healthy Church during a vacancy’ is still taking shape. It has been a great pleasure to serve Binley Woods LEP, St James, Fletchamstead, St Leonard’s, Ryton and the St Philip’s, Potters Green, in recent months and will be taking services and/or preaching on alternate Sundays through to June; I have some availability on Sundays from September to the end of 2025.

FOR CHURCHES AND CONGREGATIONS: NCD (Natural Church Development) Surveys – A small number of surveys were completed in 2024. They are best integrated with planning cycles in churches, and can lead into workshops based on the key findings; there are still ‘free’ surveys, value £250, on offer; my own involvement will be supportive, but lighter touch. The surveys still offer valuable listening to the voice of key people in your congregation and a perspective on the eight essential qualities in your church. A survey can lead to more focused work in specific areas of interest, but is also helping validate and celebrate the areas where there is already progress; they are most useful as a starting point for future focus and direction.

Recognising the Bigger Picture/LANDSCAPES: Diocesan Prayer Diary – I coordinate the Prayer Diary, hoping to see prayer ministry deepen and develop for individuals and churches across the Diocese. I would welcome your suggestions on how this strand of work might have greater traction. There continues to be a thematic focus each month (February, Healthy Churches; March, Lent; April, Easter) and Deanery focus on 11 months of the year. **Speaking Engagements & Communciations** - big picture, healthy churches agenda, influencing and speaking out on specific themes.

“It is difficult not to have plans, not to organize people around an urgent cause, and not to feel that you are working directly for social progress. But I wonder more and more if the first thing shouldn’t be to know people by name, to eat and drink with them, to listen to their stories and tell your own, and to let them know with words, handshakes and hugs, that you don’t simply like them, but you truly love them.”
~ Henri Nouwen

I line manage Simon Jones, now our Diocesan Stewardship Advisor, supporting him with the implementation of the Digital Giving Project, which is going very well indeed; I have been a member of the Board for the Coventry Schools Foundation for two years, serving on the People & Wellbeing, Audit & Risk and Education Oversight Committees (with a special interest in King Henry VIII Junior School).

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