

Pathways

The magazine for the people of the Diocese of Oxford | Spring 2019 | **FREE**



**Making a bigger
difference**
through everyday faith

PLUS: How to dwell in the Word | God in the life of... | Tesco, ergo sum?

Hello



Welcome to the very first edition of a new magazine for the people of the Diocese of Oxford.

Pathways is one of many new ideas and approaches in 2019 to help us be the best Church we can be in a world that is changing in new and unprecedented ways. Issue by issue the magazine will help us all to think afresh about inequality, our communities and what it means to be human.

Dwelling in the Word (p.20) is a process that many of us are using to listen to scripture, to each other and to God. This season I've asked the diocese to spend time with Paul's letter to the Colossians. They are verses that have inspired many of the pages that follow...

For example, as the January Sales implore us to spend more money, Guy Elsmore's reflection on page 9 challenges us to put on the Christ brand instead. Not only is that good for our pockets, it's good for the planet too. Our feature story looks at how churches and congregations are tackling climate change and includes ten steps each of us can take to reduce our carbon footprint.

The centre spread of each issue of *Pathways* gives two Christians with differing views the chance to express their opinions. Marcus Green and David Bennett are our courageous and compassionate contributors for this edition, writing about their very different experiences as gay Christians. Both letters deserve careful reading.

As I write, the future of our country following 29 March isn't clear*. The coming weeks are of great significance for our common life and the future of this nation. Join me in praying for our Government and Parliament, and that the poorest in our society are not left to carry the burden of any transition to a post-EU economy.

I hope that *Pathways* will also appeal to people who are curious about faith, so please pass on your copy of the magazine to inquirers. 'How to pray' and 'Who told you' are helpful encouragements for those who may be new to Christianity or simply looking to find out more.

Bishop Steven

* Bishop Steven recently wrote to MPs and peers challenging them to resist the four temptations of ambition, faction, nostalgia and idealism. You can read the letter on +Steven's website blogs.oxford.anglican.org

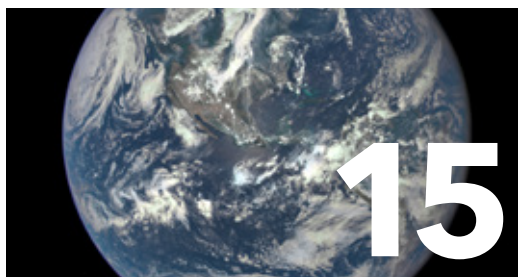
Contents



- 4 Everyday faith
- 6 God in the life of...
- 8 How to... pray
- 10 The Bible on consumerism
- 12 Head to head
Human sexuality



- 15 For the sake of God's world
Making a bigger difference
- 17 10 ways to reduce your carbon footprint
- 18 Focus on our church schools



- 20 Dwelling in the Word
Colossians 1:15-20 and 3:12-17
- 22 A prayer for mental health
- 23 Who told you?
- 24 Resources for Lent and Easter



We hope you enjoy reading *Pathways*, email or write and let us know what you think. Contributor enquiries are welcome.

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Everyday faith

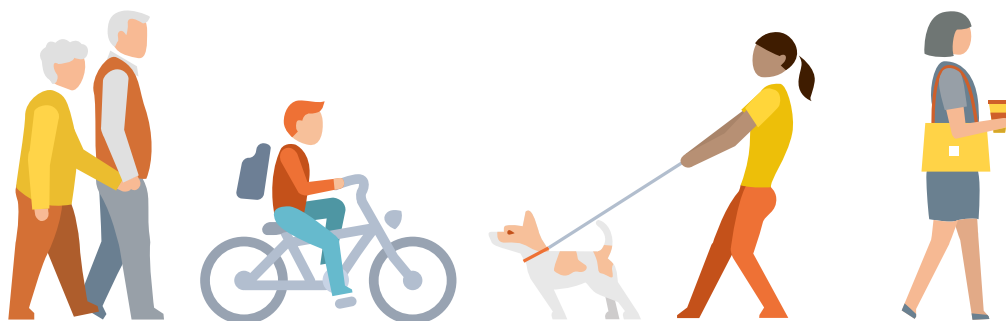
Going to church is a vital expression of our faith, but how can this time together better nurture our faith so that everyone in this diocese experiences a greater, fuller life in God from Sunday to Saturday?

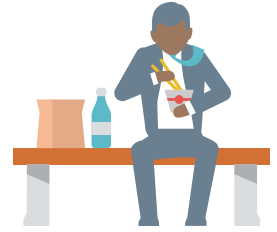
Whatever the size or tradition of your church, the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC) have identified seven small shifts that can make a big difference to the way we worship, pray and support each other in our everyday faith.

Being more Christ-like isn't a prescriptive list of things to do, it will differ for everyone. Being confident in talking about God in our everyday lives and seeing the world as Christ sees it is what counts.

One area of our common vision (see page 15) is about renewing and re-igniting the everyday faith of every person in every church. Look out for new tools and activities to do just that during 2019. ¶

The seven small shifts are an edited extract from Setting God's People Free for Monday to Saturday; a Church of England resource written by Mark Green from LICC. To find out more, visit churchofengland.org/mondaytosaturday





Visit

Visiting fellow Christians in their workplace, where they volunteer, or in the college canteen is a powerful way to encourage a culture of everyday faith. Anyone can do it.

Talk

Changing our conversations can change our culture. How can you be more curious and interested in each other's lives away from church gatherings?

Pray

Intercessions are an opportunity to pray for people in particular sectors and for the occupations, volunteering and school activities in which people are involved.

Ask

Interviewing a member of the congregation about where they'll be this time tomorrow tells them what they do every day is important to the church and important to God.

Tell

Notice boards indicate what's important to your church. Why not include a map with pictures and prayer points of where your congregation spends time during the week?


Celebrate

Commissioning people for ministries beyond the church is powerful. Who's changing job/ school, taking up new responsibilities, or starting retirement in your community?

Feedback

Preaching matters. When the person giving the sermon makes a link to your everyday faith let them know. Encourage them that what they said made a difference to you.





"I am 100 per cent confident there will be a church where every family can feel at home..."

Anna Clarke

ANNA Clarke has joined St John the Baptist's, Caversham, as their children and families outreach worker at an exciting time.

Just months after a group from Reading's Greyfriars Church crossed over the parish boundary to join St John's, Anna was taken on in her brand-new role.

Her path to children's work started in Kidderminster. She was one of five children, and her family attended the Baptist church.

"The five of us, along with a few others, made up the Sunday School. I always enjoyed it, but my faith wasn't real to me," says Anna.

It was while studying at Durham University that life began to change. "I joined the Christian Union. It was an environment where other young adults were worshipping God. I got baptised when I was 20."

Around that time, her older brother, who was a big spiritual influence, started a worship band in her home church. "We got some frowns as we were bringing instruments with wires and cables into the church and I was hesitant about whether I could be part of that.

"My brother encouraged me, and we started a Youth Alpha course. Our younger siblings invited their friends along, and around 12 sixth formers came. It was a really encouraging time and one of my first experiences of leading in a church."

Following a year of volunteering with The Smiles Foundation and a period in Spain working with children at an English Immersion Camp, Anna's

first formal church role was as a children's discipleship leader in Marlow.

Anna says she's still finding her feet in her new role but is excited to join the church so soon after a group from Greyfriars have joined St John's. "I'm getting to know people, learn about their different backgrounds and see them live out what they are called to do. It's a ministry to equip and empower people. As one person you are limited, but with a group of volunteers you can do far more."

"...there were other young adults who were truly worshipping God."

What advice would Anna give to families looking for a church that will welcome their children? "Go for it. Not every church is right for every person or every family. I would encourage anyone to try different churches. I am 100 per cent confident there will be a church where every family can feel at home, where children are loved and accepted." ¶



Find out why 15 members of Greyfriars in Reading joined St John the Baptist:
oxford.anglican.org/st-johns-caversham

Words: Jo Duckles, photo: Steven Buckley



Praying regularly helps us to develop a spiritual rhythm and changes the way that we think about our lives. Many people want to pray, but then get stuck. Life gets busy, or God seems distant, or we have a nagging feeling that we're somehow not getting it 'right'.

How to pray

Whether you're new to praying, or are confident in your walk with God, we can all benefit from ideas and inspiration from time to time. In this edition of *Pathways*, we share some prayer tips from the Church of England and Michelle Eyre, Chief Prayer Officer at Discovering Prayer.

Let's first think about Jesus and prayer. He prayed in the synagogue but sometimes withdrew from the crowds to pray. He prayed for people's healing, and he thanked God publicly for things that happened. He sometimes journeyed to mountain tops to pray, but at other times simply gave thanks for his food. His actions point to a life lived in reliance on God, that visibly sought to glorify God. He then gave us the Lord's Prayer.

The Lord's Prayer

You might decide to pray the Lord's Prayer at certain times of the day, really listening to the words. Learn some short prayers to say, as well as making up your own. Alongside regular prayer, spontaneous times of adoration and thanksgiving to God are important too. Not sure what to say? Try churchofengland.org/everyday-prayers

Silence and Listening prayer

Listening prayer doesn't try to achieve anything; we open ourselves to God who is beyond anything our minds and our words can imagine – and wait. It's part of being in relationship with God. Turn off the TV or radio and listen in the quiet, to God and to ourselves before God. Christians sometimes think of meditation as listening to God – listening in silence in the hope and expectation that God will speak, and we will truly hear and understand.

Dwelling in the Word

Absorbing God's Word is a practice with its origins in the third to fourth centuries. It was popularised from the sixth century by the Benedictine communities who still use this practice today. It simply involves slowly reading scripture and then allowing time for reflection and silence. It helps us to listen to God and remember what we have read.



Did you know every Bishop's staff meeting starts with Dwelling in the Word? Turn to page 21 to find out how you can do it too.

The Psalms

Jesus prayed at different times of the day. He used the Psalms as his prayer book, often quoting from them. They are an invaluable source of prayers as they express everything life can throw at us. *Reflections on the Psalms* offers an insightful commentary on each of the Psalms. Find it at chpublishing.co.uk

Praying with others

And don't forget the value of praying with others. Jesus said that "where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." (*Matthew 18:20*) We are encouraged to pray together, and when we do, something more seems to happen. We are like a flock of migrating birds that need each other to make the journey. ¶



Learning to pray

Whether you're a child, young person or an adult, prayer is easier than you might imagine. Want to find out more? Try churchofengland.org/learning-pray

Photo: Steven Buckley

Tesco, ergo sum

"I shop, therefore I am." Barbara Kruger's memorable one-liner goes to the heart of an important aspect of life. The choice of goods in shops and online, whether shoes, clothing, electronic devices, music or video is astonishing.

Consumerism isn't just about the usefulness of the goods we buy. Brand choice is a marker of identity defining our membership, or otherwise, of social groups. When I was in Liverpool, a story went around our curates' support group that one of us had conducted a baptism. The child's first name was given as "Reebok".

The plethora of choices available to today's consumer is a sign of the enormous range of human creative spirit. Many of us owe our livelihoods, directly or indirectly to the diversity and creativity of the consumer marketplace. The consumer market in branded goods drives creativity and innovation at an exhilarating pace.

But there is another side to consumerism. We live in a planet polluted by the plastics which are an essential part of the consumer market. Global warming increases because of the international supply chain and market for consumer goods. The brands we most covet may have been made in sweatshop factories where labour conditions are a world away from the glossy and aspirational "brand values" attached to the objects of our desire.

Many people are less defined by "I shop therefore I am" than they are by a lack of the basics (food, clean water, shelter). In my last parish we had to be careful opening the outside bin in case someone was sleeping inside it.

Brand choices must seem like an unattainable luxury to those on the breadline.

But there is an alternative. St Paul's clothing store sells the Christ brand - unavailable in the high street or online.

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." Colossians 3:12.

When St Paul helps us to put on Christ brand clothing we are no longer defined by what we think we ought to wear or the pressure to conform. Instead we are defined by what we are, in Christ, and by who we are, to others: compassionate, kind, humble, gentle and patient.

The Christ brand gives us a rooted identity which enables us not to be swayed by the ready-made identities in the marketplace and gives us the security and the perspective to make reflective, ethical choices about what we do buy. Clothed in Christ, we might find ourselves making decisions like giving more to charity than to Amazon, choosing goods with a Fairtrade label, counting the carbon footprint of our next essential purchase, buying second hand or even repairing an old item. ¶

Words: The Ven. Guy Elsmore



The following resources may be helpful to you if you would like to explore alternatives to consumerism:

ethicalconsumer.org

fairtrade.org.uk

charity-gifts.christianaid.org.uk

traidcraftshop.co.uk

arocha.org

Human sexuality



The Revd Marcus Green writes as an evangelical who questions the traditionalist approach to the Church's sexuality debates.

I can remember exactly where I was the day I realised I needed a new theology.

A friend in Memphis does work in civil rights theology. He teaches me that when you are an oppressed minority and become aware of it, Jesus is dynamite. Every word Jesus speaks is explosive because it's about you. It doesn't matter if it's about lepers or tax collectors or Canaanite women - it's about you. You hear a Gospel of life and hope and freedom, and it is God's promise for you.

This became real for me on a miserable Tuesday afternoon one February in my early 40s. I suddenly understood I had spent 30 years accepting that as a gay man I was in fact a broken straight man. Every traditionalist word spoken from every pew and every pulpit in every evangelical church I'd ever belonged to had sunk deep into

my soul. They had convinced me that being gay meant I was in fact a second-class human being. This is a terrible lie. It's shocking theology. It's appalling Bible interpretation. It was cold outside, but that day the truth was already starting to

set me free. As the song says, I'm only human: but guess what? God doesn't create rejects.

I'm going to repeat myself.

God doesn't create rejects. Seconds. Spoiled copies. Sure, we all have treasure in jars of

clay, but no one who calls Jesus 'Lord' sits in the cheap seats in the Kingdom of God.

And I knew I had work to do, because in my head was a whole Bible shouting at me about how much God loves every single person. I had believed pharisees who use the Scripture to tie up the broken hearted, when instead I needed to hear the Saviour who proclaims release for the captive.

"As the song says, I'm only human: but guess what? God doesn't create rejects"

In each edition of *Pathways*, we ask two Christians with different perspectives on topical issues to write an open letter expressing their views and experiences. Our aim is to help readers to understand different ideas and opinions. The theme for this issue follows a recent letter to clergy from the bishops, which offered reflections on current debates in the area of human sexuality.

Coming out as gay at 14 meant the Church wasn't a safe space for me.

I had relatives with strong views who would say things that were disparaging and even homophobic.

"You have to be this to be accepted and loved by God," I thought, "I'm in this category so I hate this religion because it deletes me from existence."

As I kissed a boyfriend in a park a man pulled up on a motorbike, raised the visor on his helmet, picked up a large stone and threw it onto my back. I remember this rage within me, at how such hatred could exist. I connected my experience of Christianity with that act of violence. Christianity became the thing that was in the way of the liberation of LGBTQI people.

But there was a vacuum in my life. The secular ideal of romantic love cracked in my mind. I had that Solomonic moment and knew that

the desire I had for love indicated that I was made for something higher. Later, my uncle confronted my easy relativism. He didn't tell me, but he had a word that I would meet Jesus in three months.

"I had to become poor sexually to inherit the kingdom of God"

He was right. Three months later I saw a film maker I wanted to interview for the student publication. I said, "What inspired you?" and she said, "God" - to which my face scrunched up. She offered me prayer. As she prayed, I felt tingling on the top of my head. It was as if someone was pouring a vial of oil over me. I heard a voice in my mind: "Will you accept my Son Jesus as your Lord and Saviour?" I felt this tug of war over my soul for about five minutes. Finally I said "yes" and that was when the love of God was poured out through me. I was weeping healing tears.

It's been a long journey reconciling my faith and sexuality.



David Bennett is pursuing a DPhil (PhD) in theology and a fellow at the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics.

Both columns continue overleaf

[Marcus...]

Every time in the Bible when Jesus encounters some poor soul, ground into the dirt by another 'kind' religious person, that poor soul is raised up on high.

And Jesus does it for us, too. When I thought I was a broken straight person, life could be unbearable and heavy and would break me further. There are still travails and burdens - but now I know that I too am fearfully and wonderfully made, called by name, loved. Gay people do not need to pretend to be straight/appear to be straight/not seem to be gay in order to fit into God's Kingdom order. Just because the foot isn't a hand doesn't mean it doesn't belong to the body - that's ridiculous!

We are all gloriously equal in Jesus' family.

Here's the lesson from civil rights theology: Why are the texts everyone else takes for granted not about us too? Why is this freedom and life and Good News not for us? Why do these stories only give full hope to other people?

Because if I too am only human, then Jesus died for me. And that is more than enough. No-one should call unclean what God has called 'beloved'. ☞

[David...]

I had to become poor sexually to inherit the kingdom of God. I believe scripture lands on the side of the orthodox traditional perspective. But that doesn't transform people. For me it was getting the law to be written on my heart - not just understanding the law in my mind. And that was a long process as I gave my sexuality to God.

I am so grateful that my church didn't change its theology but offered me love and the freedom to hear from God in scripture. Jesus lived without sex and he was the greatest example of human flourishing.

God loves gay people, He loves the LGBTI+ community. I feel called to be someone who articulates and proclaims that. If you are gay, that cannot separate you from the love of God.

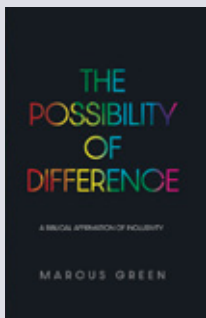
Living obediently will bring an incredible glory to Jesus. God won't put a burden on you that's too heavy to carry. God's love is unconditional. It is God's voice and opinion that matters as known in God's Word and Spirit, not human beings. ☞

Further reading and pastoral support

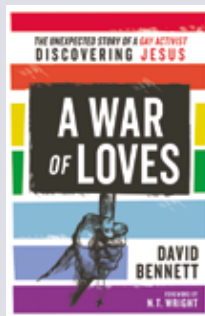
The pastoral letter, sent to 1,500 ministers in this diocese recently, set out the bishops' expectations of inclusion and respect for all and affirms LGBTI+ people called to roles of leadership and service in the church. The full text of the letter can be found at blogs.oxford.anglican.org/clothe-yourself-with-love The diocese is also setting up a chaplaincy service

for LGBTI+ people. To find out more, write to the chaplaincy coordinator at this confidential email address: inclusion@oxford.anglican.org

Marcus and David have each published books on this topic in recent months. Find out more at possibilityofdifference.blogspot.com and awarofloves.com



"This is a measured compassionate plea for a more humane argument about sexuality in the Church"
Archbishop Rowan Williams



"David Bennett's book presents a particular lived Christian experience which deserves hearing alongside others"
The Archbishop of York,
Dr John Sentamu

Making a bigger difference

The need for social justice is fundamental to our Common Vision to become a more Christ-like Church.

Our world is changing in new and unprecedented ways, we must think afresh about inequality, our communities, and what it means to be human. We need to be the best Church we can be in such a time as this: a more Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world.

From all that parishes have told us during the last two years, we have discerned seven areas to focus on in our common life together. These aren't a description of everything the Church does, but they do represent the areas that we think God is currently calling us to pay particular attention to.

In this edition of *Pathways*, we take a look at the first of these focus areas. By God's grace in 2019, this will see a carbon footprint reduction programme for our church buildings well underway and significant investment in community organising.

Making a bigger difference in the world

The needs of the planet and society can feel overwhelming; paralysing many from acting. Yet we live in a time of unprecedented opportunity: ours is a counter-cultural Gospel, we are called to care for the Earth, to live sustainably and to love our neighbour.

God is already at work through more than a thousand churches, chaplaincies and schools in this diocese and also through each of us as individual disciples. From food banks, to the Eco Church movement and our successful campaign for fossil fuel divestment, much is being done... did you know that over 520 churches in this diocese are already involved in social action? **Turn over the page to find out more.**

***"We are called to care
for the Earth"***



With over 400 of our parishes supporting food banks and as many as 1,700 community projects in this diocese, it's clear that the church is doing some amazing things.

But where is God calling us to go next in our work together? We've been listening over the last 18 months, and three key issues have emerged from all that we've heard:

Community engagement

New ways of being church can challenge the unjust structures that keep people poor and threaten the planet. We are setting up a partnership with Citizens UK to support new forms of community engagement and social action through local initiatives led by churches. In Milton Keynes, an alliance of churches, mosques, schools, unions and community groups is already working together for a fairer society.

Releasing wealth for our common good

During 2019 we will be exploring if we can better use our land, buildings and other resources across the diocese for mission and social investment. It's a complex area, and there's much thinking to be done but expect to read more about this aspiration in future editions of *Pathways*.

Care for creation

The diocese is investing £400,000 in a carbon footprint reduction programme across our church buildings, to subsidise energy audits and help churches work on environmental sustainability. During 2019 we'll also provide resources to help congregations pray, reflect and act on creation care.

Social justice is a vision of how life can and should be better. It's central to our mission and part of our Christian witness.

By engaging with our communities, dealing with the things on our doorstep that we can do something about and challenging unjust structures, we can begin to address the inequalities arising from austerity and be at the heart of tackling the environmental crisis.

And there are plenty of small steps you can take right now, such as switching your bank and savings accounts to an ethical provider, trying some of the eco actions on page 17 or supporting your local high street when you're shopping online (hive.co.uk is an excellent alternative to Amazon). ♯


 To find out more about how our churches are making a bigger difference in the world, visit oxford.anglican.org/commonvision

Photo: NASA



Reduce your carbon footprint

1

Change to a green energy supplier at home and ask your churchwarden to contact the archdeacon about a grant towards the cost of an energy audit for your church.

2

Insulate your home as much as possible: put a curtain over the front door and try to reduce other draughts. For tips on energy efficiency try gov.uk/energy-grants-calculator

3

Providing you're reasonably fit, wear a woolly and keep your house cooler. You can also save money each year by setting the thermostat to 20°C (68°F) or below.

4

Tumble dryers are energy guzzlers. Spin your washing for longer if you're going to use a dryer and use a washing line instead whenever you can.

5

Eat less meat and dairy. It's easy to find great recipes for plant-based meals, and with the money you save, buy local, better quality meat for special meals.

6

Avoid fresh food that's been flown in and don't make a special journey just to buy one item. Growing your own lettuce and tomatoes is easy to do (and tastier)!

7

Get out of the car and switch to bus, bike... or legs! Sustrans have great tips for making the switch sustrans.org.uk/what-you-can-do

8

If you have to drive, car emissions are lowest between 50-60 mph. For optimum MPG keep your windows up and your tyres at the right pressure.

9

A car can be essential if you're in a rural part of the diocese, but for those of us living in more built-up areas, could you manage without one?

10

Getting involved in your local community is one of the best ways to save the planet. Living life locally - concerts, exercise classes, church - means you're not using energy to travel somewhere else. Want to do more? See if there's a local climate action group in your area or visit oxford.anglican.org/commonvision to find out about our partnership with Citizens UK.

Words: the Pathways team with Revd. Margot Hodson, co-author A Christian Guide to Environmental Issues

Church schools

Church schools are part of our heritage, it's our privilege to nurture and support them.

But some organisations, such as the National Secular Society, say faith-based schools significantly limit choice. Pathways asked Robin Sharples, principal advisor for the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education to answer some of the most common questions about Church of England schools.

Are church schools intended for Christian children?

Just as the Gospel is for everyone so is the church school. The foundation of a church school, its Trust Deed, usually refers to it being for the 'poor of the parish' - a gift for those who have no other way of learning. Church schools were the original community schools. From their origins in the industrial revolution they blossomed into a movement which led to free schooling for all.

Do church schools make children into Christians?

Church schools are places where everyone is encouraged to explore faith and where all faiths are treated seriously. People of different faiths often choose church schools and in them we find many different stories being told and learned from - all in a Christian context where the stories of Jesus form a constant backdrop. Evangelism is not permissible in state church schools, but they are part of God's mission. They are places where our faith is available to people of every culture and creed without any coercion, places where the love of God is made manifest for everyone.

Why are church schools inspected twice?

Church schools are inspected by Ofsted and also by inspectors trained and appointed by the Church of England Education Office (CEEO). This is not a diocesan inspection; the inspectors follow the Schedule for the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS).

If a church school becomes an academy, does it stop being a church school?

A school retains its character as a church school when it becomes an academy. It is still inspected under SIAMS. There are two diocesan academy trusts and Oxford Diocese ensures that there is church representation within any trust which takes in a church school.

Church schools are out of date and irrelevant

Evidence says otherwise. Many church schools are oversubscribed and are the school of choice for many parents. Their ethos and Christian vision create an environment where the fruit of the Spirit is visible, and which offers pupils both challenge and security.

Photos: clockwise from top left - Christ Church, Oxford | Holy Trinity CE Primary School | Jo Duckles | Penny Boden



There are 283 church schools in our diocese and education is a major part of our Common Vision strategy. Church schools enjoy support from the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education and benefit from resources published by the Church of England Education Office.



Why not get involved with your local school? Offering your time to read with the children, considering becoming a governor or getting involved with organisations like Open the Book or REinspired can make a huge difference!

You can dwell in the word with younger members of the family too! We really like this ICB translation of Colossians. Chat or pray about these verses with children on the way to school, over dinner or at bedtime - make it work for you and your family.

¹⁵ No one has seen God, but Jesus is exactly like him. Christ ranks higher than all the things that have been made. ¹⁶ Through his power all things were made—things in heaven and on earth, things seen and unseen, all powers, authorities, lords, and rulers. All things were made through Christ and for Christ. ¹⁷ Christ was there before anything was made. And all things continue because of him. ¹⁸ He is the head of the body. (The body is the church.) Everything comes from him. And he is the first one who was raised from death. So in all things Jesus is most important. ¹⁹ God was pleased for all of himself to live in Christ. ²⁰ And through Christ, God decided to bring all things back to himself again—things on earth and things in heaven. God made peace by using the blood of Christ's death on the cross.

...

¹² God has chosen you and made you his holy people. He loves you. So always do these things: Show mercy to others; be kind, humble, gentle, and patient. ¹³ Do not be angry with each other, but forgive each other. If someone does wrong to you, then forgive him. Forgive each other because the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ Do all these things; but most important, love each other. Love is what holds you all together in perfect unity. ¹⁵ Let the peace that Christ gives control your thinking. You were all called together in one body to have peace. Always be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the teaching of Christ live in you richly. Use all wisdom to teach and strengthen each other. Sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ Everything you say and everything you do should all be done for Jesus your Lord. And in all you do, give thanks to God the Father through Jesus.

These verses are from the International Children's Bible®

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How to dwell in the Word

Dwelling in the Word is a process that many people in the Diocese of Oxford are using to listen to scripture, to each other and to God. It's not about sharing information or seeking scholarly answers or even the right answers to the issues raised in the text. It's about listening each other into free speech and discerning what God is up to.

It is far from magical or formulaic; it won't solve all the problems or answer all the questions, difficulties and issues you have to address. However, over time, this discipline forms a community of the Holy Spirit, where the Spirit is as welcome and expected as anyone else there.

In our current season we are encouraging everyone to dwell on *Colossians 1:15-20* and *3:12-17*

To dwell in the Word set aside at least 20 minutes and start with the prayer:

God of gentleness and love draw near to us as we draw near to you. Dwell in every heart and conversation. Fashion in us the likeness of your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us to discern together all that you are calling us to be and all that you are calling us to do. Assist us, by your Spirit, to become a more contemplative, more compassionate and more courageous Church for the building of your kingdom and the glory of your Son. Amen

- When everyone is ready, begin with one person reading the passage out loud to the group.
- Now let some silence unfold as people let the words have their impact. Notice where your attention lingers. This might be a word or a phrase.

- Ask a second person to read the passage out loud once more.
- Each person in the group finds someone they know less well and listens to that person as they say what they heard in the passage. What captured their imagination in the passage and what would they like to find out more about? Each person should listen well as they will be asked to report back to the rest of the group (or another pairing if you're a large group) what their partner said.
- What have you heard that might be significant? Discuss as a group what God might be up to in the passage for your group on that day. It can be helpful for the facilitator to make a brief note of what she or he hears from the group and to capture that in a short prayer at the end.
- Finally, let people know that as your conversation on other matters continues, anyone at any time may call for the Gospel and the group will return to the passage. ¶

Dwelling in the Word is not the only way to study scripture, but if you'd like to find out more *Dwelling in the Word - A Pocket Handbook* is available to purchase from Church Mission Society.

God of Compassion,

You meant us to be both fragile and ordinary.
Silence the voices that say we are not good enough,
Haven't achieved enough,
Haven't enough to show for our lives,
That we are not enough.
Help us to know that we are treasure,
We are prized,
We are cherished,
We are loved.
Infinitely.
By you.

So be with us in our corrugations of feeling:
When our hearts are in downward freefall, be with us
When our minds race with anxiety, be with us
When our throats close in fear, be with us
When sleep will not come, be with us
When waking hurts, be with us.
In the name of Jesus,
Who knew trauma, abuse, despair and abandonment
And has nothing but love for us,
Amen.

It's natural to feel down, anxious or stressed out at times. In fact one in four of us will be affected by mental ill health at some point during our lives. If this is you, why not take a moment to say this prayer. Unsure how to pray? See page 8. ¶



Churches can play an important role for those experiencing distress or mental ill health. For useful resources visit inclusive-church.org/mental-health

Sandra, Bob and Bruce told me...

I'd been to Church in my youth, but not much. My twenties were spent living life as though it was only I that mattered. Earning money, driving nice company cars, time with the lads... they were the only things. It was the end of the eighties, and I was having a ball.

I always felt there was something more. I got involved with some charities, took an interest in what they were doing, started to give money. My values were changing, but I was still chasing the bigger salary, the better position... more for me.

Three Christians got in the way of all that. The first was Sandra, a work colleague who could quote any verse of the Bible verbatim. She could be overwhelming at times, but we got on well and ended up having lots of conversations about faith.

Bob popped up next. He spent many hours patiently answering my early questions about Christianity. Bob had a bookshelf at his home, purposely lined with useful material he could give away to people like me. I went away with *Journey into Life* and *Questions of Life* by Nicky Gumbel.

Shortly after that, I was in Barcelona for work. I sped read the book over a weekend. Everything was coming together. I wanted to become a

Christian, and it wasn't about just being good, it was about having a real and daily relationship with Jesus.

That Sunday night, I tried to say a prayer that would commit my life to Jesus. Surely it would be easy, some simple words with my eyes closed and my hands clasped? It wasn't. I wanted to say that prayer but couldn't, I felt like I was in a tug of war. Then, all of a sudden, a feeling of peace came over me. I said the prayer committing my life to Jesus and went soundly to sleep.

It was time to look for a church. I tried a few but at one, an independent church, Bruce, the pastor, spotted me walking in nervously. He spent the whole service sat at the back of the church, explaining what was going on and just chatting. I'll never forget the welcome and unconditional love I was shown. I had, finally, found my home in Christ.

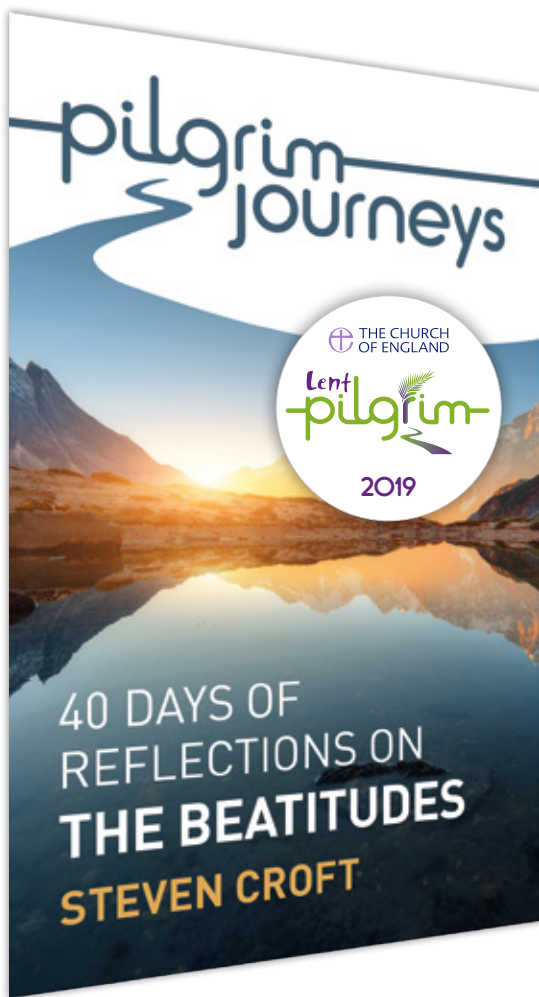
What of the 18 years that have followed that Sunday? Well, they've been full of trials and tribulations, but Christians continue to get in the way of those too, and I've become better and stronger in my faith thanks to them.

As told to Pathways by Steven Buckley



Who told you? If you'd like to share how others helped you on your own journey to faith, then please get in touch with us at communications@oxford.anglican.org

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