

# archdeacons' visitation news

## Dear Churchwardens

On behalf of the archdeacons, I would like to express our enormous thanks to all churchwardens for your resolute and committed service. The last year has been unusually challenging. Your ingenuity and patience have helped your parishes to negotiate the changing public health environment and the maze of shifting rules and guidelines. It is a testament to the fortitude of churchwardens that your church buildings have been as safe as they have whilst the doors have been open, and that your church communities have remained active in their mission and ministry whilst the doors have been closed.

A couple of years ago, I attended a lecture on evolving patterns of leadership. The speaker talked about an emerging environment which was characterised by the acronym VUCA. The type of world the speaker described was volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. I remember thinking that at least three of those words didn't particularly resonate with life in the Church of England. With the benefit of hindsight, I now appreciate how prescient these words were. We can probably all think of ways in which we have encountered volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity since the first lockdown.

As churchwardens, you play a vital leadership role in the life of your communities of faith. Much has been written about how best to offer leadership in these unpredictable times. For me, one thing that stands out is the importance of being a non-anxious presence. This has always been important. But it does have particular resonance now. The non-anxious person is present and calm, even when others are not. They are objective, quietly assessing the situation, and offering perspectives that are helpful. No-one is immune to anxiety. The real non-anxious presence who can always be depended on is Christ. Our relationship with Christ helps us to provide a non-anxious presence in our communities. Psalm 112 speaks of such people. They will never be shaken and 'will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord.' (Psalm 112: 6-7) As your church communities face the consequences of long lockdowns and explore opportunities for building back better, we pray that your leadership will help people to calmly discern how God is leading.

Please be assured of our prayers and best wishes. We are always pleased to hear from you. Don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or concerns. The Lord be with you.

**The Ven Stephen Pullin**  
Archdeacon of Berkshire



### Churchwardens and safeguarding

Churchwardens' work has always involved the maintenance of order. Safeguarding is an important aspect of that.

All churchwardens are required to complete three modules of safeguarding training: **Basic Awareness, Foundation and Leadership**. Churchwardens must have a DBS check in parishes where there is work with children or vulnerable adults.

Thank you for all that you do to make our parishes safer for all.  
[oxford.anglican.org/safeguarding](http://oxford.anglican.org/safeguarding)



**The Ven Stephen Pullin**  
Archdeacon of Berkshire



**The Ven Judy French**  
Archdeacon of Dorchester



**The Ven Jonathan Chaffey**  
Archdeacon of Oxford



**The Ven Guy Elsmore**  
Archdeacon of Buckingham

# How will your church building support its congregation and community in the future?

**Absence from our churches during lockdown may have renewed our appreciation for their unique qualities as spaces to worship, but it may also have drawn attention to challenges the church building presents. Is it warm enough? How accessible is it? Does it have the facilities needed to enable hospitality or use by the community? Is it welcoming? How does it support you in becoming a more Christ-like church, for the sake of God's world? What role is it playing in our journey to net zero carbon by 2030?**

Much of the above is not actually about the building, it's about the people within it, but the bricks and mortar have a role to play.

It has been a demanding time and I know that parish teams may be feeling the strain and wondering what the future may bring. My colleagues in the Mission and Ministry team, the Parish Development Advisors, are here to support parishes reflecting on their mission and vision. The Church Buildings team can then help you think about how your buildings can facilitate that vision. One building may be highly architecturally or historically significant and therefore more challenging to alter, but with much potential to attract visitors. Another may have a convenient car park, perfect for holding concerts. One may have the potential for extension and another a frighteningly large repair project. A building may have a mixture of these features, or a whole set of different ones!

Whatever the building, it needs to work for you, not against you. Never has that been more the case. This is a challenging time, but when working with church buildings you begin to think in decades, even hundreds of years. 712 of the 812 churches across the diocese were built in the Victorian era or earlier. They have stood in our communities for generations, and have quietly witnessed the

Church extension at Great Tew.  
(Photo: Acathus Clews Architects)



Jennie Schillig (left) and Sophie Hammond inspecting stonework repairs to the tower at Chadlington.

impacts of war, political and religious upheaval, previous pandemics, and changing socioeconomic circumstances. And they are still standing! We may just have to get creative and collaborative to make the most of them.

The Church Buildings team had to pause our training programme last year to enable us to respond to the COVID-19 crisis by supporting parishes in lockdown, processing over 1,000 applications and enquiries for works to churches. We worked with the Diocesan Registrar and Chancellor to make legal changes to make it easier to get permission to make alterations to church buildings to make worship safe and enable internet connectivity and streaming.

Now we are redoubling our efforts to produce resources and training to assist parishes in thinking about their church buildings, understanding the process for obtaining permission to carry out works, help on where to find funding and how to run a church building project. These will include videos, webinars and guidance documents. We will let you know via eNews as soon as they are available.

My work also includes exploring how we can support parishes in the day-to-day work of managing church buildings. We have been looking to other organisations to learn from them, and are exploring what might be possible. I would be grateful to hear from parishes on what they might find helpful.

Speaking of works to church buildings inevitably brings up the faculty jurisdiction, and having worked with this legislation for nearly 10 years I understand the sighs of despair and trepidation that no doubt follow! Whilst it is a complicated beast (you can read my thoughts on it at <http://bit.ly/Faculty-Jurisdiction>), the Ecclesiastical Exemption, which is what brings the faculty system about, is critical to ensuring that churches continue to function as centres for worship and mission, and not as museums. However, it needs to be made as simple as possible to use. As a piece of statutory legislation, there is nothing we can do to change it, but we are working hard to make the process as transparent and user friendly as possible. If there is more you feel we can be doing, please let me know.

My colleagues and I are here to help you realise the potential of your building for mission, and to support you navigating buildings projects and the permissions process.

**Liz Kitch**, Senior Church Buildings Officer  
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# New Congregations

**Together, we have set an ambitious target of seeing up to 750 new congregations form in the next decade, created through church planting and establishing Fresh Expressions of church.**

Coronavirus has challenged the church significantly, with traditional patterns of ministry changing overnight, but has also been the catalyst to hundreds of new online congregations being created within weeks, or even days. Coronavirus has brought great creativity.

As Chair of the Rural Advisory and Reference Group, I am particularly interested to see how the rural church responds to this ambitious target. With large areas of Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire being made up of small rural communities, and most rural churches being an essential part of the communities they serve, the rural church is key to meeting this target.

Rural churches often have a privileged place in their communities with strong ties to schools, parish councils, community groups and residential homes. Church members and clergy are often well known within their communities and they feel the heartbeat of their villages.



You may have heard of some of the larger projects arising from work on new congregations, but I am very pleased to know that the learning that has come from these projects is beginning to be shared with the rural church. 'Greenhouses' seek to support local initiatives to become new congregations through training, resources and shared learning. One of our new Greenhouses will see Cogges Church in Witney partner with neighbouring rural churches to share learning as all churches seek to see God's kingdom grow. Watch the video on the 'Growing new congregations' page of our website to hear from those with direct experience of growing congregations in Witney and elsewhere.

The new congregations target is a challenging one, but the resourcefulness and creativity that we have seen through the pandemic will be essential as we work towards the establishment of new congregations across the diocese.

**The Revd Canon David Tyler**, Associate Archdeacon of Dorchester

## Resourcing hubs

Greyfriars Church is one of five churches currently identified as resourcing hubs. These are often large churches (but not always) that support and resource local churches to grow, to revitalise and to flourish.



The Revd Nick Hill joined the team at Greyfriars Church in Reading in September 2020 as an Associate Minister.

Greyfriars Church, in a fourteenth century building in the centre of Reading, has a long history of resourcing new worshipping communities. In 2002 a new community, New Hope, was sent out to the housing estates south of the Thames, and in 2011 a church plant was sent to St Matthew's, Southcote. More recently, in 2018, a group of people from Greyfriars formed a 'graft' and joined the congregation at St John's, Caversham. Their generosity in the 'giving away' of themselves has brought new energy, resources and new hope to the struggling church communities around them.

Nick was appointed with a very specific brief. Firstly, he will spend a year in the Greyfriars congregation, and build a team who will then move with him to the parish of Whitley. This graft will embed itself in the congregations at St Agnes with St Paul and St Barnabus – three churches in a diverse and impoverished part of Reading, with a growing population of over 20,000 people. Nick is beginning to work in partnership with the parish to discern where God is leading and what their new identity will look like. He is asking them to *stop* what they are doing, to *listen* to what God is saying, and to *wait* on God to seek the new thing that he is doing in South Reading.

Nick is excited by the mission ahead of him and the possibilities for the parishes that will welcome him and his team. Through conversations, prayer, visioning evenings, developing partnerships and the help of a facilitator, he will build relationships and help to widen the vision of the parish. Nick recognises that each of the churches comes with their own identity, and he knows how important it is for them to retain this as they work together with a new team to grow the kingdom.

Resourcing hubs like Greyfriars are just one part of the New Congregations vision for the diocese and are bringing hope and missional energy to churches like those in Whitley.

**The Revd Liz Jackson**, Associate Archdeacon Berkshire  
[oxford.anglican.org/growing-new-congregations](https://oxford.anglican.org/growing-new-congregations)

## A vital contribution



Together with the parish priest, churchwardens are responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the parish. Their work is vital to the wellbeing of our church communities, but did you know that, at the time of publication, 20% of our warden posts were vacant?

Do you have a succession plan in place for your benefice? Could you support neighbouring parishes with vacancies to recruit new wardens? You'll find links to training courses,

resources and the handy *Being a Churchwarden* leaflet on the website: [oxford.anglican.org/churchwarden](https://oxford.anglican.org/churchwarden)

### Resourcing you, resourcing your church

**Flourishing together** When we work well together, as the whole people of God, lay and ordained, we offer a powerful alternative model for life and ministry – and others notice. *Flourishing Together* is a practical guide to establishing and maintaining good rhythms of work, leadership and prayer and is available free of charge to wardens. Have you received your copy?

[oxford.anglican.org/flourishing-together](https://oxford.anglican.org/flourishing-together)

**Church House Quarterly** is our regular email update for Churchwardens, PCC Secretaries and Treasurers. Look out for your copy in June.



**Livestreaming** The need for internet connectivity to support livestreaming from our church buildings is greater than ever before. Grants of up to £1,000 are available for parishes/benefices to support livestreaming. Details of how to apply, case studies and recommended kit lists, along with sources of funding, are at [oxford.anglican.org/capital-fundraising](https://oxford.anglican.org/capital-fundraising)

**The EcoHub** When it comes to the environment, it can be hard to know where to start when it comes to practical things churches can do to make a difference. The EcoHub is your one-stop shop for information, advice and theological reflection on how we can best care for God's creation. To get your parish on a pathway to net zero, visit [oxford.anglican.org/ecohub](https://oxford.anglican.org/ecohub)

### Planning beyond the pandemic

The journey of recovery will be slower than our journey into lockdown. Like every other part of society, it will take time for the church to rebuild and respond to the changed world around us. Part of being a contemplative church is to reflect carefully on the lessons learned over the past 12 months. Three resources from the diocese are designed to help you do just that.

*Emerging from Coronavirus* is based on the Anglican Five Marks of Mission. It invites parish leadership teams to reflect on 'what has been lost through the pandemic which we need to grieve, what has been reduced that we need to let go of or to build up again, and what has emerged that we need to respond to?'

[oxford.anglican.org/emerging-from-coronavirus](https://oxford.anglican.org/emerging-from-coronavirus)

For parishes/benefices looking to go deeper, the *Parish Planning Tool* is designed to help PCCs and local leadership teams explore the things that have worked really well and to carry them forward in new and transformed ways. The pack contains everything you need to help you navigate God's call for your church, and our Parish Development Advisers are on hand to provide help and support to use the tool and plan your sessions well.

[oxford.anglican.org/parish-planning-tool](https://oxford.anglican.org/parish-planning-tool)

And if you're in need of inspiration after a difficult year, why not listen to Bishop Steven's *Reflections for a Church in Lockdown* and *Comfortable Words*? They are available at:

[blogs.oxford.anglican.org/podcast](https://blogs.oxford.anglican.org/podcast)

### Talking about Parish Share

Finally, you probably know that the Parish Share is the amount of money that each parish is asked to contribute to support the provision of mission and ministry of the Church in the Diocese of Oxford. But did you know that only two pence in the pound goes on diocesan administration costs? This leaflet sets out how funds are used: [oxford.anglican.org/parish-share](https://oxford.anglican.org/parish-share)

### For more information

**Call:** 0345 777 3322 **Email:** [churches@ecclesiastical.com](mailto:churches@ecclesiastical.com)

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