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VISION IN FOCUS



Introduction

Welcome to the latest edition of Vision in Focus, which this month looks at Discipleship.

From the importance of small groups and a range of resources and courses to help these important meetings flourish, to a piece about Quiet Days held by Tymawr Convent, this edition has lots of practical advice and information about how “we can grow more like Jesus.”

But it was a line from Archdeacon Ian, which really resonated with me, “*The good news of Jesus is too good to keep to ourselves.*” We should be able to share our stories of faith and the video from Revd Chris Burr helps us do that with confidence.

Happy reading :)

*Debra Goddard
Diocesan Communications Officer*



Good news of Jesus is too good to keep to ourselves



In lots of churches there is a tradition of people standing up to tell people their 'story of faith'. That isn't so common in most of our churches, but it's really important that we do know our story, and that we could tell that story to people if they want to hear it.

In the short video below, Revd Chris Burr, Tutor in Ministerial Development at St Padarn's, talks about how we can prepare our story, emphasising the fact that the story doesn't have to be dramatic! Most of our stories aren't, but what is important is that our stories are OURS.

Told honestly, they will have an impact as we're honest about the difference our faith makes in our lives. And that doesn't mean our lives will be perfect, or we'll be perfect - probably far from it! What we bring is our experience, our joys and sometimes sadness, our courage and doubts, but above all the reality that our relationship with God changes our lives for the better.

The good news of Jesus is too good to keep to ourselves and we can be part of that good news as we live it in our lives and share it with others.

The Ven Ian Rees
Archdeacon of Monmouth and Director of Ministry



Revd Chris Burr, Tutor in Ministerial Development at St Padarn's

Meeting Together

The culture of meeting together in small groups is one that has been shown to have an important effect on churches growing, as well as individuals feeling more confident in talking about their faith. It can be really difficult to find good times for people to meet and there is no perfect answer, but one of the benefits of ministry areas is the opportunity to offer a wider range of groups. These will be at different times and often differ in format and style. Some will be groups for people thinking about faith, some for thinking about the bible more or for special times of prayer, some for discussions. Some might be totally different and involve activities such as book clubs, special interest groups, walking groups - the list is almost endless! What is important is that we offer times for people to be together and help them to feel confident in talking about faith.



Resources for small groups

There are all kinds of resources for courses that can run for small groups. They range from bible study courses to courses exploring particular issues, to courses which just enable us to talk more about our faith. We also have a number of 'in house' diocesan courses.



Two new courses have recently been launched to help our churches further develop their culture of invitation and welcome.

This culture is really important in our churches. Whether someone is visiting a church for the first time or is a regular attender, the welcome that is offered very often reflects the life of the church.

A good welcome is something that some people will offer naturally, but for churches it is always worth spending time on ensuring that we do welcome well! It is also good to reflect on why welcome is important anyway! Recognising the importance of our welcome we have two courses which we hope will help churches consider the warmth of welcome offered.

Other courses are available on the diocesan website at:

https://monmouth.churchinwales.org.uk/en/prayer_and_spirituality/discipleship/

Take a look and see which one or ones might be best suited to your ministry area. If you would like any further advice or to chat about this more please contact [Archdeacon Ian Rees](mailto:archdeacon.monmouth@churchinwales.org) at archdeacon.monmouth@churchinwales.org

United!

Recently, I've quoted the following story a number of times. It speaks of our need to constantly seek to 'tune in' to God and recognise that by doing that, we are united with others all over the world seeking to do the same thing. I've been asked on a number of occasions to share it more widely, so here it is!

There's a story that A W Tozer offers in his book, '*The pursuit of God*'. He writes,

“Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshipers [meeting] together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to become 'unity' conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.”

It's quite a simple piece, but one that reminds us that as Christians we are strongly bound together as a family. When we look around us, sometimes our minds (and even our hearts) are tuned to look for differences, to look for the things that keep us apart, but as Christians we are already linked powerfully to one another when we look to God.

Imagine what we can look like, and be, if we are recognising, amidst all of our diversity and uniqueness as individuals and churches, that we are in fact united in this powerful bond... We don't need to ever compete in God's kingdom because his grace and his love know no limits.... Look to God and pray with and for others day by day!

The Ven Ian Rees
Archdeacon of Monmouth and Director of Ministry

Celebrating 'Women of Prayer' at Tymawr Convent



Throughout this year, the Sisters of the Society of the Sacred Cross have been celebrating the centenary anniversary of their arrival in Wales at Tymawr Convent with a series of Quiet Days and other events.

Between 30 to 40 people from across our diocese attended each of the events, including Bishop Cherry who attended every one. Tymawr was blessed to welcome back people eager to renew their friendship with the convent after the lock downs of the last few years, and by people who have found Tymawr for the first time. It has been a celebration, in every sense, of the legacy of the small band of women who moved from Chichester and arrived in Wales on St. Teilo's day in 1923 to create a house of contemplative prayer.

During the Quiet Days, the speaker was given the overall theme of 'Women of Prayer' - and what a fascinating variety of approaches emerged!

"In February, when Tymawr Convent grounds were awash with snowdrops, the first Quiet Day with Dr. Jane Williams, McDonald Professor in Christian Theology at St Mellitus College, was entitled 'Contemplative Prayer and Mission'. Jane invited us to see that our practice of prayer is deeply connected to the character and purposes of God. Far from being a life-style choice, to be a pray-er is to be drawn into the action of God in the world.

“In May, when wild daffodils covered the meadows, the Rev. Dr. Hannah Lewis SCL, a BSL deaf priest in Oxford Diocese, came for a day entitled ‘Widows, Mothers and Virgins’. Hannah used the Gospel story of the widow’s mite (*Luke 22.1-4*), and the lives of St. Monica of Hippo, mother of St. Augustine and St. Frideswide of Oxford, to explore our reliance on the generosity and service of others, the cost of resisting cultural expectations and social structures and the pressure to be anything other than God wants us to be. This day also gave us valuable insights into the practical ways in which everyone can be included in worship and prayer, thanks to advice from the Rev. Mary Moore, who was diocesan chaplain to the deaf community at that time.

“By June, our fields were full of Common Spotted Orchids when the Venerable Karen Lund came from Manchester diocese to give us a fascinating insight into ‘Teresa of Cartagena and God in the Silence’. She introduced us to the life of a medieval mystic, whose experience of suffering through the loss of her hearing in her early twenties became the mainspring of her spirituality and whose writing challenged the sexist stereotyping of her day.

“All our Quiet Days start with the monastic Office of Terce, close with Vespers and share the midday Eucharist with the Sisters – and all these days have been blessed with good weather. Participants have used our chapels and explored Tymawr’s gardens and meadows during the periods of the day given for meditation and prayer.

“In July, when Sr. Gemma Simmonds CJ, a senior research fellow at the Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology, Cambridge, and a Sister of the Congregation of Jesus, led a day on ‘Mary Ward: a radical contemplative’, Tymawr’s large kitchen garden was flourishing. Gemma challenged us to examine how personal experience of God enables each of us to find “their voice for God”. Through the use of a series of contemporary paintings illustrating the life of Mary Ward, Sr. Gemma explained how by contemplating the events of her own life, Mary Ward learned to recognise the inner movements of her heart; to value her experience and have the courage of her convictions; to let go of strongly held positions; to be patient and listen; to dare to walk into an unknown future recognising the value of women’s contribution in the world. Her charism is one that is one that resonates with women across time and in different circumstances.

“Then in September, when the apple and pear trees were groaning with fruit, Professor Nicola Slee, a published poet and theologian, inspired us with video presentations of poets speaking their own work on the themes of dying, death and loss. Through the lens of poetry, Nicola led us into an exploration of how through using poetry as prayer, life’s limitations may turn into abundant living, and how the stages of life, which may be experienced as “being cut-off”, can bring an incarnational richness.

“Every one of these days has brought a deeper understanding of ‘Women of Prayer’ and given insights into our personal and corporate prayer life. Each speaker has shown us how prayer engages our personal experience with the world. Deo gratis.”

Rev. Dr. Jean Prosser MBE
Chaplain to the Society of the Sacred Cross, Tymawr Convent

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