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VISION IN FOCUS





Introduction

Happy New Year to you all!

Well, I can't believe Vision in Focus has been around for a year! Hopefully you have found it interesting and informative - which was the plan :)

Each month we have looked at each of the branches of our diocesan vision in more depth - however, as it's January - this edition takes a look back and a look forward, covering all the branches.

From the launch of our *9 days of prayer and mission* to monthly tips and tricks to help with our stewardship goals - there's plenty to explore!

With the temperatures outside at a steady freezing - why not grab a hot cuppa and have a read?

*Debra Goddard
Diocesan Communications Officer*



Silver eco award for diocesan office!



Congratulations to the team in the diocesan office which has work hard around its practice and culture to be awarded a silver Eco Church award.

You may remember in a previous edition of Vision in Focus we mentioned the team working towards the award, and in just a few months they have achieved it!

Diocesan Secretary Isabel Thompson, said: “You may have noticed that we have made some simple changes that have a big impact on the environment. Our toilet paper is from a renewable source and we are slowly replacing our consumables with an eco-alternative. We are also rolling out a programme of changing lighting to LED. Some areas which are used less frequently now have movement activated lighting so that we do not waste energy. It has been as much an attitude change as it has been a practical change as we live out our faith through caring for God’s creation.”

Archdeacon Stella Bailey, added: “The Church in Wales has committed itself to the journey towards NetZero and it is excellent to see the simple changes we have been able to make in the Diocese Office which has helped us on that journey.”

Many of our churches are also working with the A Rocha charity to help us all care for God's creation a little better. Find out more [here](#).

Stewardship - are you up for a challenge?



Over this past year, we've looked at how we can use our different gifts to generously support our churches and our communities. We do this in gratitude to God, for all that he brings into our lives; and in doing so we share a measure of his love with others.

This year we've created a set of 12 Mini Stewardship Challenges to look at the multitude of ways we can practice good stewardship in our daily lives. As you move through the year, we hope you'll discover new ways to serve God and be thankful and generous people.

1. January – Help out in church

Think about volunteering to do a reading, perhaps sign up for the coffee rota or to welcome people at the door, help with tidying up after a service, or step forward to fill another gap you see. We are so grateful for all the little things which add up to make our churches such loving and supportive places.

2. February – Greet your neighbours

Build some new bridges and talk to someone new this month, either in church or elsewhere in your life. Saying 'hello' with a smile can have a far greater impact on someone else's day than we can ever imagine. Be that warm light to others.

3. March – Increase your giving

Consider increasing your monthly giving by £1 or more, if you're able to, or making a one-off contribution to your church. Your generous support enables our churches to continue to stand and serve their communities; through pastoral care, school visits, life events, and more!

4. April – Invite someone to a service

As disciples, we are called to share the good news of Christ's saving grace with others.

This can be done as simply as offering an invitation to an upcoming service. Bring a friend or family member with you to celebrate our Risen Lord. Or think about other church events or groups you could invite them to. Sometimes they are just waiting to be asked.

5. May – Plant something

Caring for creation is one of five branches in our diocesan vision and, as good stewards, it is our responsibility to nurture and maintain the environment we've been blessed with. Think about how you could help pollinators by increasing green spaces or simply take time to reconnect with the earth and do some gardening. If you don't have a green thumb, look for other ways you could support the environment this month.

6. June – Donate something

Pass on a blessing to someone else in need. Perhaps you have some clothes or toys that are no longer needed by you but are still in good condition to help someone else. Does your local food bank have a list of items they're in need of? Something as small as a tube of toothpaste could make a huge impact for another family. Help where you can.

7. July – Cook/Bake for someone

Does your church have a fayre that you could support with a cake or two? Do you have an elderly neighbour who may appreciate a cooked dinner? How about inviting some friends over for a BBQ or trying out a new recipe with family? Our faith is present in everything we do; reflect on the love you share with others while preparing a meal.

8. August – Create something

We have all been given different talents. Reflect on your own gifts this month and create something celebrating the wonderful person God has made you. Are you a carpenter? An artist? A musician? An innovator? A writer? A gardener? Whatever your gift – create something with God.

9. September – Volunteer somewhere

Spend a day helping out and offering your time to others this month. This could be through church, a charity, a school, or anywhere else. If you already volunteer somewhere regularly, think about what gifts you receive through your work and consider inviting others to join you. Remember it wouldn't be the same without you– you are making an impact.

10. October – Pray for others

Prayer itself is a gift, don't keep it to yourself. Expand the circle of those you pray for this month; this may include increasing your time spent in prayer. If you need a helping start, try using our diocesan prayer cycle.

11. November – Support your local community

Connect with your community this month. We do not live in isolation – how can you bless and support your local network? Could you support local fundraisers, shop locally, attend community events?

12. December – Support a charity

This is the month of giving. Jesus chose us as his cause, which one will you support this month?

Welcome courses and discipleship



Advent and Christmas offered the perfect opportunities to be invitational and engaging - with many new faces entering our churches for carol concerts, crib services etc. So let's build on that and make 2024 even more welcoming!

The focus of our Diocesan Conference was all about the importance of welcome and how being invitational is key to all aspects of our diocesan vision and vital to growth.

Two new courses have been produced to help our churches further develop the warmth of the welcome offered.

'Croeso' is a discipleship course offering an opportunity to reflect on welcome using some bible passages. There are questions for discussion and also a time for reflection and response. The course has 4 sessions.

'Extending our welcome' is a more practical based course thinking about the detail of welcome and offering some practical tips for welcome. As well as the obvious welcome that is offered (for example at the entrance door), there is detail about how the look of things like buildings and churchyards make a big difference in people's perceptions. There are also various checklists for you to consider where you think welcome is going really well and where you think it may need more work.

Find our more [here](#)

9 days of prayer and mission



The need for the transforming power of God in our world and neighbourhoods is more stark than ever. There is a greater hope that we can offer the world. It is our hope and prayer that those who have not heard the Good News of Jesus and his love for the world will hear it for themselves, giving them an opportunity to respond. We are excited to invite you to join using a new, diocese wide, initiative to run from Ascension to Pentecost – 9 days of Prayer and Mission. This is an opportunity to partner with God in prayer and mission so your community can encounter the love of Christ. We are encouraging your ministry area to spend the 9 days from Ascension (9th May) to Pentecost (19th May) in praying 'Thy kingdom Come' and in living out the vision of Gods Kingdom on Earth. Across your churches you can have a schedule of prayer and activity that prays for your local area and reaches out in mission. Our collective outreach will be celebrated at a Pentecost Service on **Saturday 18th May** in St Mary's Abergavenny, where we can gather with, Bishop Cherry, to joyfully worship and pray together as the Diocese family. Teaching and Activities will be put on for the children and youth and the service will be followed by refreshments. Each day you can hold a different prayer or mission activity.

Here are a few starter ideas....

- Arrange a rota for your church to be open for quiet prayer and reflection and publicise this across your area. Maybe set up some prayer stations with simple instructions to help people to journey in prayer.
- Organise a community litter pick.
- Undertake an eco project in your churchyard or register for Eco Church and spend this week working towards your bronze award.
- Hold a community picnic and invite those you know who are on their own or have been recently widowed.

- Hold an outdoor service to demonstrate that the church is actively praying for its local area – and allowing for the spirit to prompt those who are passing to be curious.
- Undertake a prayer walk.
- Plan a partnership project with your local school i.e visit a nursing home, provide an afternoon tea, draw together the different generations.
- Take up a special collection for the local foodbank.
- Hold an open churches event or family fun day.
- Start a good neighbours project.
- Have a schedule for daily prayer to happen across your churches or for a rosary group to gather each day.



For more ideas and resources, check out the [Thy Kingdom Come website](#)

Racial Justice Sunday

EXODUS!

JUSTICE FOR GOD'S PEOPLE ON THE MOVE



Sunday 11 February is Racial Justice Sunday.

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, has produced resources which explore the movement of people from their homelands to the places they now call home, and examine the motivations behind this movement – the journeys made, and the reception or welcome received on arrival.

This year's materials include:

- prayers
- sermons
- reflections

According to the latest figures from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'At least 108.4 million people around the world have been forced to flee their homes. Among them are nearly 35.3 million refugees, around 41% of whom are under the age of 18.'

[Read more on the Churches Together website.](#)

The Racial Justice Sunday resources aim to shine a biblical light on what is currently taking place, and the way Christians are (and can) make a difference within these spheres.

The aim is to inform, challenge and inspire everyone to pray and take action, so that hospitality and not hostility becomes our overall approach to those fleeing persecution, peril, poverty and war.

Resources can be downloaded [here](#) - please consider using some of it in your acts of worship that day.

For a downloadable and printable version of this email please click [here](#).



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