

AUTUMN 2025

LINK

The magazine for the Diocese of Newcastle

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Link and Link Extra

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A message from Bishop Helen-Ann



The Bishop of Newcastle, Helen-Ann Hartley

A couple of weeks ago, I had a bit of a revelation. During an early morning walk through a forest while on holiday, I came across something that literally stopped me in my tracks.

I was suddenly struck by the appearance of light on tiny water droplets dangling rather precariously at the end of leaves. In the early morning light, the droplets lit up the space like fairy lights. It was staggeringly beautiful and incredibly fragile all at once.

I came away from that encounter mindful of the gift of being in nature and the reality of the climate crisis that has very recently made headlines again with this being the hottest UK summer on record. News reports told of provisional temperatures showing the average temperature across June, July and August as being 16.10C, beating the

previous seasonal high of 15.76C set in 2018.

In the face of such challenge, it is easy to feel helpless about matters that might seem more out of our control than in it. I was struck too by a Prom concert I heard recently on the radio. A piece of music called Breathing Forests by the composer Gabriella Smith clearly hit a chord with the audience in the Royal Albert Hall, not least because it included the organ and required the organist to literally place his arms across all of the keyboard to generate an extraordinary sound. It must have been quite spectacular to witness.

Quite a lot of Gabriella Smith's work seeks to highlight the climate crisis and in an interview about her compositions I was struck by her comments that "so many people are just in this hole of doom-ism,

because that's such a part of our culture. They feel so much despair, I think."

Those are the types of conversations I've had with people...To make an impact is not about convincing people that it's real, but convincing people that climate solutions can be part of our lives, our daily lives, our culture. And it can be fun!

It's joyful to be part of a community that's doing this. To inhabit this space, I think takes an attitude of gratitude. And that needs both courage and intentionality. I'm delighted that we now have two churches that have achieved Gold Eco Church Award status: Berwick Parish Church, and St Francis' Church, Heaton. Congratulations to them and may they inspire each one of us even in small ways to tread more lightly on our precious planet Earth.

Bishop Helen-Ann

Petertide ordinations - welcoming our



Bishop Mark, The Revd James Bartle, and Bishop Stephen

We rejoiced this summer as we welcomed our new priests and deacons at the Petertide ordinations in Newcastle Cathedral. Congratulations to all who were ordained, and as they begin their ministry, please give them a warm welcome if you see them in your parish.

On Saturday 28 June, the Revd Francesca Walsh, the Revd Claire Lewis, the Revd Lee Kirkby, the Revd Deborah Ehala and the Revd Jon Grogan were ordained as priests by the Bishop of Berwick, Mark Wroe.

On Tuesday 1 July, the Revd James Bartle was ordained as a priest by the Bishop of Beverley, Stephen Race.

On Sunday 29 June, the Bishop of Newcastle, Helen-Ann Hartley ordained Fran Bell, Emily Emmerson-Finch, Yvonne Gardner, Phil Keates and Andy Morsman as deacons. The Bishop of Botswana, Metlha Beleme attended the service as part of his visit to the Diocese.



The Revd Francesca Walsh, The Revd Claire Lewis, Bishop Mark, The Revd Lee Kirkby, The Revd Deborah Ehala and The Revd Jon Grogan

new priests and deacons



Called to be a chaplain – Katy's 10 years at Marie Curie

When Katy Francis felt called to ordination, she was in no doubt that it was to serve as a chaplain. Now after a decade as chaplain for Marie Curie North East, Katy continues to live out her calling with distinction and unwavering commitment.

Marie Curie provides expert end of life care for people with any illness they are likely to die from, and support for their family and friends, in hospices and where they live.

Katy's role, to lead on spiritual and religious care, both within the Marie Curie hospice, Newcastle and elsewhere across the region, is a demanding one.

She helps people come to terms with their diagnosis and the consequences of it. In some cases, early weddings and relationship blessings are organised, letters are written to loved ones, memory boxes are made, and difficult questions are asked.

Katy is involved every step of the way, working with patients and their families on the challenges they face together.

"There are questions about faith," said Katy. "Questions about where God is in all of this and it's important to allow people to express what they are thinking. Everyone is at a different stage of their journey, but it is a privilege to be with them and their families. I meet some truly remarkable people."

The hospice is a real haven, with each inpatient room opening out onto beautiful gardens. There is a café, a Wellbeing Centre offering everything from art therapy to tai chi, as well as access to physio, occupational therapists, social workers and more.

"People think hospices are gloomy places but they are full of joy," said



Inpatient rooms open out onto beautiful gardens at the Newcastle hospice

Katy. "It is really life-affirming. The staff are wonderful. The nurses do an incredible job and people eat well - we have some amazing chefs in the kitchen."

Katy felt called to chaplaincy while serving as a nurse and midwife, where she worked closely with healthcare chaplains. This work took her to Scarborough, Leeds and Edinburgh. She also served with the Edinburgh Medical Missionary Society (EMMS) in Nazareth, at the London Lighthouse, and spent time in Saudi Arabia.

Katy served at Sprotbrough Parish in Doncaster before joining Newcastle Diocese, initially working as chaplain at the Newcastle Hospitals for six years before joining Marie Curie.

Officially known as the



Revd Katy Francis, she added: "Sometimes the title can be off-putting, especially for those who may have had a difficult experience with the Church. I am there for everyone, all faiths and none."

"I love my job and no two days are the same. Sometimes I will take a wedding, a blessing or a baptism and it is a joy to be part of such special occasions, which can be very moving."



The Revd
Katy Francis

Coffee and cakes are proving to be a great catalyst for bringing new people into a prominent church in Newcastle.

Coffee is getting everyone talking at St Thomas'

St Thomas', in St Mary's Place, was launched as a Resource Church for Newcastle Diocese in 2019, serving as a hub for mission and ministry.

Its prominent location in Newcastle's Haymarket has enabled St Thomas' to try different ways of reaching out to people, such as offering pizza to university students during freshers' week.

Now a new initiative has been born out of that early success. Run by a team from the church, Tommy's Coffee is now providing hot drinks and tasty treats from the entrance of St Thomas' five days a week (Monday to Friday, 7.30am to 5pm).

A cupboard that once stored chairs has been transformed to accommodate a coffee cart, from where house roasts and baked goods such as cookies, flapjacks and cinnamon buns are now being served.

Like any other coffee shop, customers are free to take away their purchases or they can congregate in or outside of the church foyer. However, if they choose to 'sit in', they can find a seat or explore the church building.

"It's very friendly", said Luke Porter, Creative Director at St Thomas'. "Our team is very welcoming. We say 'hi', ask people how their day is going and see if they want to chat.

"When people come and sit in the church with their coffee, it often leads to interest in the history of the church and of course we're happy to show them around and answer their

questions.

"Sometimes people want to talk about Jesus and faith. Everyone has the chance to be prayed for if they want that. One guy came in for a coffee and two or three weeks later he made a commitment to follow Jesus."

Luke said there has been a diverse mix of visitors to

Tommy's Coffee, ranging from students to tourists and people who work in the city.

He added: "Food and drink is a great way to connect with people. Previously, we were only able to do that a few times a year. We wanted to try something more permanent and Tommy's Coffee is now enabling us to have conversations with people and build relationships every day. Do call in next time you're passing. You will be very welcome."

All profits made from Tommy's Coffee go to St Thomas' Church to help fund further mission, ministry and outreach work.



Companion link renewed with the Diocese of Botswana

A long-standing link between Newcastle Diocese and our companions in Botswana has been renewed. Bishop Helen-Ann was delighted to welcome the Bishop of Botswana, Metlha Beleme to Newcastle Cathedral, where a new companion link agreement was signed during the ordination of deacons service on 29 June.

The new agreement represents a commitment to walk together as Christian disciples from the Diocese of Newcastle and the Diocese of Botswana.

During his visit, Bishop Metlha presented Bishop Helen-Ann with a new diocesan crozier, which was used for the first time during this service.

The Newcastle-Botswana Anglican Companion Link was first entered into, and agreed in September 2003, with Bishop Martin Wharton and Bishop Theo Naledi being the first signatories of the agreement, as respective bishops of the two dioceses at the time.



Bishop Helen-Ann and Bishop Metlha with the newly signed companion agreement



Bishop Metlha presents Bishop Helen-Ann with a new Diocesan crozier



Bishop Helen-Ann and Bishop Metlha sign a new companion agreement during a service at Newcastle Cathedral



A warm welcome at the Bishop's House garden parties

Bishop Helen-Ann welcomed many people from across our diocese and the wider region to a series of garden parties at Bishop's House.

They were wonderful, social occasions with stimulating conversa-

tions and great food, all to the backdrop of live music.

The garden parties, which took place in July, provided an ideal opportunity to connect with others from both diocesan and civic life.



Friendship agreement renewed between Newcastle and the Diocese of Møre



Meeting with representatives from local church councils at Rødven Stave Church, one of only 28 stave churches remaining in the country



Bishop Helen-Ann and Bishop Ingeborg signed a renewed partnership with the Diocese of Møre in a stave church on the island of Grip



Morning prayer on the 'Train Chapel' in Rauma

At the end of May, representatives from the Diocese of Newcastle travelled to Norway to renew a longstanding friendship agreement with the Diocese of Møre, originally established in 2000.

The visit commenced with morning prayer in the unique "Train Chapel" at Åndalsnes. The chapel, created from an old railway carriage

donated by the Norwegian State Railway, was consecrated on 10 June 2003 by Bishop Odd Bondevik in the presence of King Harald V and Queen Sonja of Norway.

Following the service, the group ascended Romsdalseggen via gondola, where discussions were held on the Church's role in modern society. The delegation later met with local church council representatives at the

historic Rødven Stave Church, one of only 28 stave churches remaining in Norway.

On their second day, the group gathered for morning prayer at Molde Cathedral, led by the Dean of Newcastle, The Very Revd Lee Batson. Productive discussions ensued with diocesan staff and the Church Music Council before exploring the cathedral's renowned organ.



Above and below, a joyful outdoor service in Frei to celebrate Ascension Day



Returning to Molde via the scenic coastal route, 'Atlantic Road'



A visit to the Kulisteinen, one of the earliest historical markers of Christianity in the country. Part of the inscription reads, 'Twelve winters Christianity had been in Norway'



A privilege to meet May Bente Anita Jønsson, leader of the Sami church council



The two deans: The Very Revd Lee Batson, Dean of Newcastle, and Grethe Lystad Johnsen, Dean of Molde Cathedral

Ascension Day saw a joyful outdoor service in Frei, after which the group enjoyed a boat trip to the island of Grip. There, Bishop Helen-Ann and Bishop Ingeborg of Møre diocese signed a renewed partnership agreement, reaffirming their shared commitment.

An overnight stay at an eco-camp on Smøla included an inspiring meeting with May Bente Anita Jønsson, head of the Sami Church

Council. The programme also featured a visit to the Kulisteinen, one of Norway's earliest Christian markers inscribed with "Twelve winters Christianity had been in Norway," and insights into the government's pilgrimage initiative.

On the final day, the week concluded with a confirmation service at Spjelkavik Kyrkje. The group also learned about the meaning

behind its stained-glass windows, visited the Church City Mission ("Kirkens Bymisjon") to understand its community outreach, and ended the trip at a service in Ålesund Church.

The representatives praised the week as "a real privilege" and expressed eager anticipation for continued partnership and mutual learning.

Generosity of the spirit is filling hearts in Morpeth



Enjoying a cuppa after a service



Coffee has played a key role in generosity at Morpeth

There's a feel-good factor sweeping across Morpeth – and everybody is feeling generous! It's not a new thing. Morpeth Parish and its three churches, St Aidan's, St James' and St Mary's, have always been kind and welcoming places of worship.

But the introduction of Generous June, every year since 2021, has focused on generosity of the spirit – being kind, giving and compassionate to others, without expecting anything in return.

Over the last two years, the month of June has had five Sunday and weekly services that have been used to promote a different theme related to generosity.



"There's always something to find about generosity in the lectionary," said the Revd Canon Simon White, Rector of Morpeth. "We had some really uplifting services in June and on the fifth Sunday, we brought everyone together for a café church to celebrate generosity."

"We're celebrating all that God has done for us. What is growing here is generosity of the spirit. We want people to feel safe, fulfilled and valued in church."

While generosity has many forms, Simon stressed that Jesus is at the heart of it all, both in services and in everyday life.



All generations are represented in church



Generosity of the heart has sparked many a conversation at Morpeth



The Revd Canon Simon White chats with a parishioner

He explained: "One theme we focused on was that Jesus paid for our sins; he died for you and me. Therefore, we need to share that with others."

"Everyone was encouraged to try the concept of 'paying it forward'. An example of this is when you buy a coffee or a doughnut, pay for the next person's, if you are able to. In the context of what Jesus did for us, you 'pay it forward' in the treatment of others. This has led to some wonderful results and some heart-warming stories."

"We are welcoming and sharing Jesus, praising and praying, learning and growing, caring and connecting to the community."

While Generous June has been a success once again in 2025, generosity remains a regular theme throughout the year in the whole parish. It is evident in PCC meetings, governance, giving, welcome and worship.

"It's not just a one-off," said Simon. "Giving and receiving is part of our discipleship journey. We have always been a generous parish. We recently baptised someone who said they felt loved, despite not knowing any of our people. She discovered the generosity of God through the generosity of the church. The love that she experienced was the love that was projected by the church."

The focus on generosity has changed the culture of Morpeth Parish, with over 150

people attending five different services each Sunday across the three churches. This ensures a huge turnout for joint services. Even PCC meetings have been transformed, with a generous way of thinking focusing each discussion.

"If you fill people's hearts, generosity will follow," concluded Simon.

● This year's Church of England online Generosity Week service will be streamed from Morpeth Parish. You can watch it online at www.churchofengland.org on Sunday 28 September at 9am.

● For more information and support contact our Generous Giving Team via newcastle.anglican.org/GenerosityTeam

Newcastle church is 100th nationally to win gold eco award



The Revd Rob Lawrance and the eco church team in the Sanctuary Garden at St Francis Church, High Heaton, created on a once neglected patch of land

St Francis' Church, High Heaton, became the 100th gold awarded eco church in England and Wales back in July. The award is from the Christian conservation charity A Rocha UK. It reflects St Francis' commitment to walk in step with nature and put creation care at the heart of what they do.

In winning the award, St Francis' became the first church in the Diocese of Newcastle to reach the gold standard. It came eight years after the church first earned a bronze award back in 2017, followed by silver in 2020.

An A Rocha UK volunteer assessor who visited the church said, "St Francis' is the furthest north gold-awarded Eco Church - and will be a beacon in this part of the country. They have been pursuing the environmental agenda for

many years and demonstrate a passion for campaigning on environmental issues locally and nationally, and have embedded creation care in every aspect of church life."

St Francis' Church has demonstrated its commitment to the environmental message by participating in the production of a local magazine distributed to 3,500 residents, as well as sharing eco tips and weather summaries on its website.

Work has taken place to reduce the heating costs in what is a challenging, uninsulated building, constructed in 1953, and creating a pollinator friendly oasis in the tranquil and thoughtfully planted sanctuary garden on a once-neglected patch of land.

The Reverend Robert Lawrance, vicar at St

Francis' Church, said: "We are thrilled to receive the A Rocha UK gold Eco Church award, which will boost us in our goal to achieve net zero carbon by 2030, and so much more. We believe that caring for the environment is a key part of our mission, and we are keen to continue on our green journey. With teamwork and a bit of effort, anyone can get started with eco church."

Bishop Helen-Ann said: "It's a wonderful achievement by St Francis' Church in reaching gold eco church status and I congratulate all involved in this remarkable accolade. I have no doubt that this will inspire our other churches - many of whom are already on their own impressive eco journeys. It underlines a strong determination across our diocese to strive for net carbon zero and an unwavering commitment to look after God's wonderful creation."

Berwick Parish Church is celebrating this summer after becoming the latest church in Newcastle Diocese to achieve A Rocha's gold eco award.

The accolade recognises an ambitious three-year period for the Grade I listed church, which is committed to eco-focused developments both within the historic church and its grounds, with the support of the wider community.

A high-profile part of the project came last autumn, when Bishop Mark memorably scaled the roof of the 375-year-old building to bless the 26 new solar panels at Holy Trinity & St Mary.

The panels are estimated to reduce carbon emissions by the equivalent of 6,897 car miles per annum. They are also reducing electricity bills and enabling money to be made through feedback into the national grid.

In the churchyard, there is a beautiful wild-flower meadow, extensive tree planting, a herb garden and the provision of habitats for bugs, birds, bats, owls, hedgehogs and bees.

A Rocha was particularly pleased with the sheer number of wild areas within the churchyard, where many butterflies and other pollinators can be found, as well as naturally occurring wildflowers.

The A Rocha report concluded that the outdoor planting was appropriate to the site for pollinators to provide food for birds and for biodiversity.

The church's dedicated eco group was praised for seeking advice from the local parish council and conservation groups, and also for drawing on the knowledge of a local bee-keeper - an environmental psychologist who held an informative climate crisis café, as well as other specialists at Northumberland County Council and Northumberland Wildlife Trust.

Community involvement with the project was also recognised. A local business sponsored a shed for beehive housing, while children's groups and nearby schools played their

Gold award boosts Berwick's eco drive



The Revd Lee Taylor with church members who worked on the projects for the Gold Award

part in the creation of bug hotels and tree planting.

Other creative initiatives include recycling, the use of environmental cleaning materials and catering in accordance with the LOAF principles of locally produced, organically grown, animal friendly and fairly traded.

An eco prayer, written by environmental champion Anne Horne, was described as "beautiful" by A Rocha.

The church is currently exploring different types of air source heat pumps, as well as infrared heating and pew warmers.

Efforts to spread the green message of the church has led to community and church talks and presentations, as well as brief slots on BBC Radio Four and BBC regional online news.

The Revd Lee Taylor, vicar at Berwick Parish Church, said: "This award is the recognition of a lot of hard work and actual life-changing behaviour not just from our wonderful eco-group but from all our congregation and beyond. As a recognition of what we've achieved so far, it's also an impetus to carry on and go further as we live well as part of God's good creation."

This summer, we had the privilege of welcoming school leavers to Newcastle Cathedral as they prepared for the transition to their next school.

It was a delight to be joined by nearly 500 pupils from across the Diocese, for four services that took place over three days in June.

After an introduction from Diocesan Youth Adviser, Susan White, the pupils took part in a variety of different prayer-related activities.

These focused on their time at school so far and giving thanks for special memories, while also helping them to prepare for the challenge ahead.

Following the prayer-related activities, the schools joined back together again for a short service, led by Children and Youth Team Leader, Tara Russell, where children were given the opportunity to share a special object from their school.

Each session had a different speaker with Bishop Mark, Bishop Helen-Ann, Archdeacon Catherine and Archdeacon Rachel each taking a turn.

A huge thank you to everyone who helped with these events, particularly students from NCEA Duke's Secondary School who enthusiastically led prayer stations on each of the three days.

Newcastle Cathedral hosts school leavers' services



Bishop Mark with pupils from Morpeth All Saints CofE First School



Sometimes things have to change in order to grow, just like butterflies. Children think about what they are looking forward to in their new school



Pupils from Whitley Memorial School consider challenges they may face as they move to a new school



An engaging talk from Bishop Mark



Students write down something they are sorry for, throwing it away as they seek forgiveness



Pipe cleaner people represent someone the children are thankful for

Windows shine light on centuries of history at St Peter's Wallsend

A church in Wallsend is home to some of the UK's most fascinating historic treasures.

St Peter's has the largest collection of Irish stained glass in Britain, including works by the renowned artists Michael Healy (1873-1941) and Ethel Rhind (1877-1952).

It's understood that Rhind's *The Good Shepherd*, *Mary of Bethany* and *David* (1921), is the only existing complete Rhind window remaining nationwide, after others elsewhere were destroyed during the Second World War.

The four windows by Healy (1873-1941) include *Angel of the Resurrection* with *St George* and *St Christopher* and *Our Lord Walking on the Water* (both 1921).

Much later, in 2017, Thomas Denny, who designed and created the *Transformation Window* at Durham Cathedral, made and fitted the *Stella Maris* window at St Peter's as a belated thanksgiving for the church's bicentenary in 2009.

Many of the treasures inside St Peter's pre-date the church, which opened in 1809 and is a Grade II listed building. It was built to replace a much older place of



Mavis Dunton, churchwarden, Revd Michael Thompson and Mel Hill, churchwarden with the font

worship – the 12th century Holy Cross Church which fell into a state of disrepair by the end of the 1700s. Services, including weddings and baptisms, took place temporarily at the neighbouring school-house, before the current church was constructed.

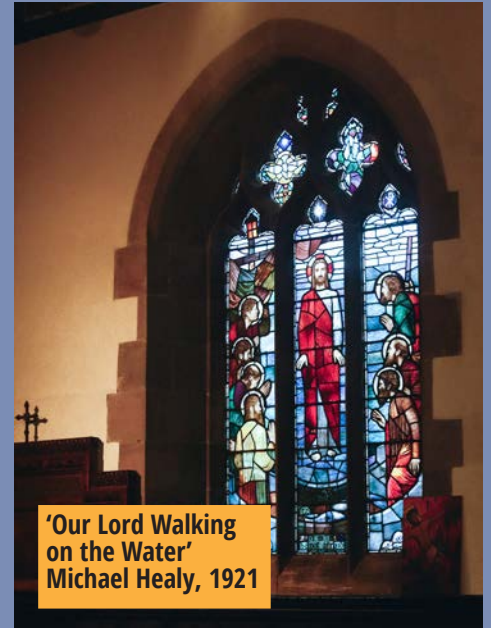
The font from Holy Cross now stands within St Peter's. As churchwarden Mavis Dunton explains, it has endured a remarkable journey.

"We understand the font dates back to Roman times," said Mavis. "Sometime after Holy Cross fell into disrepair, the font ended up in the Wallsend Burn, before being rescued and later given to St Peter's when it opened in 1809."

Other notable features include a 16th century chest from the church, which appeared on an episode of the BBC's *Antiques Roadshow* over a decade ago, and a Harrison & Harrison pipe organ from 1892.

The ceiling is adorned with angel sculptures, believed to have been inspired by shipbuilding in the area, while out in the churchyard are the graves of 200 people from the community who were tragically lost to pit disasters.

More recently, in the 1980s, a statue of St Peter was commissioned by the Revd Peter



'Our Lord Walking on the Water' Michael Healy, 1921



'Stella Maris' (Star of the Sea), Thomas Denny 2017

Strange, then rector of St Peter's.

Given the significant history at St Peter's, it hosted a Heritage Open Day on 13 September, where visitors were invited inside to explore.

"St Peter's is a very special place," said Mavis, who has been a regular at the church for 42 years. "We embrace our history but we also have a devoted congregation and are a very active church."



St Peter's Wallsend

Living the Lantern



By the Revd Canon Zoe Heming, Canon for Mission at Newcastle Cathedral



The Cathedral community is enriched by members who have come from places where Christians face persecution

It's been nearly a year since my family and I moved to Newcastle. Settling into a new home is never easy, but the warmth and support we've found here has made our move 150 miles north-east a joy.

Newcastle has been a City of Sanctuary since 2014, part of a nationwide network that supports asylum seekers and refugees as they rebuild their lives. On my first Sunday, a group of Iranians introduced themselves, hoping to restart the Bible study groups that my much-missed predecessor, Canon Peter Dobson, had begun. Some had been part of the Cathedral community for some time, and others, like me, had just arrived. What began as a group for Farsi speakers has grown into a vibrant, multi-language Bible study – with a touch of Geordie, of course!

Through this group, we have deepened our

understanding of Jesus, whose parents became refugees to protect him and who lived – and died – under the oppression of military occupation. For those of us who have never faced such realities, forming friendships with people who have, has opened new, life-giving ways to connect with his story.

This journey has been a true learning curve. In today's world of social media and sound-bites, my understanding of migration was largely shaped by the news, often framed as a divisive issue. Many of the Cathedral community wanted to move beyond the headlines and truly support the friends whose journeys have brought them here.

An asylum seeker is someone fleeing persecution who has arrived in another country, identified themselves to the authorities, and exercised their legal right to seek protection.

A refugee is an asylum seeker whose claim has been accepted and who now has the same rights as any UK resident. In the North East, fewer than 2,400 asylum seekers live among a population of over 2.6 million – just 0.09%.

At a time of increasingly heightened tensions, we celebrate how enriched our cathedral community is by members who have come from places where Christians face persecution. On Sunday, 12 October, West End Refugee Service will host a Q&A on the asylum system after the Cathedral's 10am Sung Eucharist. Our Harvest Collection, concluding on Sunday, 19 October, will support their vital work. Find out how you can contribute at newcastlecathedral.org.uk/harvest

Newcastle is truly a City of Sanctuary – and I'm grateful to call it home.

Reflecting on 'Seeking the Disabled Christ' at Newcastle Cathedral

Newcastle Cathedral recently hosted 'Seeking the Disabled Christ', a striking exhibition of prints by Dr Rachel Holdforth – a disabled and neurodivergent theologian and spiritual director based in Newcastle. The collection invited visitors to rethink traditional portrayals of Jesus, embracing the diversity and complexity of human experience.

"I created this exhibition from my own life, faith and experiences, and those of others who live with disability," said Rachel. "The exhibition asks: what if we saw Jesus as disabled too?"

Through bold lino-prints, informed by conversations with disabled Christians, Rachel presents Christ in deep solidarity with those historically marginalised. "Jesus is fully God and fully human," she explains. "His wounds show us that perfection does not mean the absence of pain or weakness. All people are made in God's image. You don't have to be strong or able-bodied to be complete. God made everyone with love and purpose."

Accessibility was integral to the exhibition, which featured images of Christ depicted with visible and less visible disabilities. The exhibition included braille, tactile prints, and audio descriptions, which were accessible via an online gallery.

"It was a pleasure to work with the Cathedral and Ric Whaithe, the diocesan Director of Mission and Ministry, on this project," said Rachel. "The Cathedral's Lantern Project, which seeks to engage and give a voice to communities who are often forgotten or marginalised, fits very well with its ethos."

The exhibition's launch event drew nearly fifty attendees. Rachel added: "It was wonderful to hear people engaging in thoughtful conversations about faith and disability."

As part of the exhibition, a networking lunch and quiet afternoon provided space for dis-



Dr Rachel Holdforth



An image of 'Blind Christ' by Dr Rachel Holdforth

abled and neurodivergent Christians to take a more reflective look at the exhibition, with prompts for prayer and creativity, culminat-

ing in a liturgy.

An online talk attracted nearly 80 bookings from attendees nationwide. "It was a privilege to hear of particular images resonating with other Christians' lived experiences of disability and neurodivergence," Rachel added.

"There's been interest from other venues keen to host the exhibition. Along with the Cathedral, we're looking to establish a network of disabled and neurodivergent Christians in the North East, with meetings both in-person and online."

To host the exhibition, invite Rachel as a speaker, organise a quiet day, or express an interest in joining the network, please contact **Rachel Holdforth at rkh260@gmail.com**.

'Seeking the Disabled Christ' and its accompanying resources remain available to view online at wobblygoose.com.

Licensed Clergy conference at Hexham Abbey

Hexham Abbey hosted this summer's clergy conference – a joyful occasion over two days.

It was an opportunity for clergy from across our diocese to join together in prayer, reflection and fellowship.

Ce Pacitti, Continuing Ministerial Formation Officer for Newcastle Diocese, said: "We were expertly led - with humour, candour and wisdom - by Sister Doctor Gemma Simmonds, a sister of the Congregation of Jesus and an ecumenical canon of the Church of Wales, in the Diocese of St Asaph."



Clergy gather for the conference



Bishop Mark presides at the Eucharist



Sister Dr Gemma Simmonds leads a range of thought-provoking sessions



Bishop Helen-Ann joins in discussions



The Revd Canon David Glover distributes Communion

The Worldwide President of the Mothers' Union Kathleen Snow paid a special visit to a community project in Benwell.

The Mothers' Union supports Something Wonderful, an initiative based at St James' Church Benwell. It aims to strengthen the local community, regardless of people's backgrounds or beliefs, ensuring it's a place where everyone can eat, learn, create, do, or be - 'something wonderful'.

Revd Chris Minchin, Team Vicar for Mission at Benwell and Scotswood Parish, thanked the Mothers' Union for its generous support of the project.

Kathleen, who is from Canada, leads over four million members of Mothers' Union throughout the world in 84 countries.

During her visit on 8 July, she was introduced to the Mothers' Union trustees and the amazing cooks who feed hundreds of people, the creative writers' group, which is filled with talent and the inspiring work of the art group, which was on display.

Midday prayer was led by Anne Blight, Deanery Leader for Newcastle West, with the theme of refreshment and enrichment.

In her speech to members, Kathleen stressed that the Mothers' Union is

Mothers' Union Worldwide President visits Something Wonderful in Benwell



Kathleen Snow (centre) with Newcastle Mothers' Union Trustees

stronger together, highlighting how different the projects were around the world as the organisation works towards a future free from violence, poverty and

injustice.

She said: "With kindness, courage and compassionate action Mothers' Union is working with people of all faiths and none, actively supporting people at the heart of communities worldwide."

The church was gracefully laid out and the atmosphere, when filled with Mothers' Union members, was marvellous. The day ended with an inspiring service, full of incredible prayers and a lovely reading. A live band lifted songs of praise to the roof.

Margy Tasker-Brown, MU President in Newcastle Diocese said: "As Mothers' Union is 150 years old next year and, with Kathleen at our head, I have every confidence that we will continue to touch many lives for the better for years to come."



Kathleen Snow meets with those involved in the 'Something Wonderful' community project

Breakfast club offers a great start for



There's nothing like a hearty breakfast for getting the day off to the best possible start.

It's a healthy habit that has become a daily occurrence at Chollerton Church of England First School at Barrasford.

The school is among several in our diocese to have signed up to the Government's Early Adopters Breakfast Club programme, a pilot scheme that supports families in feeding their children well.

Free breakfasts, with options including cereal and toast, are served between 8.15am and 8.45am, before the start of the school day.

"It has been really well received by both children and parents," said headteacher Glenda Glenwright. "The children enjoy coming in early and eating with their friends. There's



definitely a social element to it and it promotes routine at the start of the day.

"The breakfast club is also a good option for

families who have work commitments and need some additional support. It offers them a bit of extra childcare in the morning as well as a healthy breakfast for the children."

early risers



The free breakfast club started earlier this year and is available for children in reception to Year 4.

Government funding has offered a small support, per pupil, towards the costs of food and staffing, but the longer-term aim is for schools to find their own way of generating funds for the scheme.

While the pilot scheme is not free for nursery age children, parents can pay for them to attend the breakfast club.

Chollerton school also provides a separate Wrap Around Care initiative – a childcare option, which enables participating families to send their children to school from as early as 7.30am and for them to stay later, from 3.15pm to 6pm.

Wrap Around Care, which also started earlier this year, is not a free service for parents, but both schemes work well alongside each other, even though they are separate initiatives.

Other healthy eating options at Chollerton include fruit as a mid-morning snack. Milk is provided free for children up to the age of five. For older children, parents can choose to pay for milk.

Seeking to Sharing: enabling one another to say what we see (and seek)

By Ric Whaite, Director of
Mission and Ministry

As part of our turning outward towards our communities and region, and seeking to hear from a more diverse set of voices, we are in the middle of a three-year reorientation summarised as Seeking, Sharing, Sending. Lay and ordained colleagues serving in parishes, chaplaincies, and at the diocesan office Church House, shaped the Year of Seeking by emphasising the role of discerning where God is working in our lives and contexts as the foundation for our shared life and witness as a diocese.

Since September 2024, this meant discerning where we noticed God with us, or God at work with others, and discerning how to articulate what we noticed in our attentive prayer.

Our discernment was also provoked by sharing this question: “Where do you notice God at work in your context?” We did this via postcards and discussion, inviting one another to respond to the question, and to return the postcard to Church House.

Our faith teaches that we are made in the image of God, that we are places where God is at work.

Our shared life as a diocese can be understood as an extension of this: enabling and encouraging one another to express how and where God’s grace has been with us. There is not one correct story to be told in unison here, only a trust that the stories and ways God is with us, have always been many and varied, in season and out of season.

Encouraging and enabling one another to articulate where and how God is working alongside us and others is part of our shared calling as those who have been named and called by God in baptism.

So, as we enter this autumn into a Year of Sharing, we don’t lay down seeking and take up something new (sharing). Rather, we pay attention together to how we might more faithfully express the works of God we’ve noticed.

Some of the postcards we received underlined how this sharing needs to begin in the places where we don’t feel able or enabled to share where we’ve noticed God.

We want to be as faithfully articulate as we can be about the gifts and responsibilities we share in our diocese. Our Year of Seeking has shown that our sharing can fruitfully develop attending to where God is working by offering opportunities for prayer and fellowship and learning across the deaneries. We hope this will be part of the next chapter of deanery planning process, and look forward to your participation once details are finalised later this year.



Ric Whaite

A vicar walked almost 250 miles in just three weeks to complete a challenging yet inspirational pilgrimage.

The Revd Diana Johnson, vicar of Riding Mill and priest in charge of Slaley and Healey, took on 'The Long and Winding Road' through the Pennines.

Starting and finishing in Riding Mill, Diana's journey took in parts of the Tyne Valley and Hadrian's Wall, County Durham and the Yorkshire Dales. Yet despite interchangeable conditions and some difficult terrain, the 70-year-old avid walker took it all in her stride.

"The heat going over Cross Fell was intense," said Diana. "But by the time I got to Yorkshire it was fairly grim, so the weather was a mixed bag. One day there were extreme winds, it was foggy and I was soaked to the skin."

Nevertheless the walk, which involved stopping at churches, chatting to people and theological reflection, was a thoroughly enjoyable experience for Diana.

"At Ingleborough, in the Yorkshire Dales, I met three parties of students who were carrying out activities for the Duke of Edinburgh Award. They had smiles on their faces and enormous enthusiasm. It was a tremendous boost to my spirit on what had been a tough day."

Diana, who previously served more than 20 years in the army and is a qualified mountain leader, took on the pilgrimage alone, with her luggage being transported from one accommodation provider to the next.

Vicar takes inspiration from others on 250-mile pilgrimage



The Revd Diana Johnson outside St James' Church Riding Mill

Other highlights included being invited to a lay led service by the Askrigg congregation in the Yorkshire Dales, sharing evening prayer at a United Reformed Church in Keld, North Yorkshire, and meeting people at hostels along with way, while enjoying a cool glass of lemonade.

Closer to home, Diana met some supporters in Blanchland, who had journeyed from Slaley and Riding Mill to meet her for supper.

Diana's efforts raised an impressive total of

£3,000 for the charities supported by her parishes – Chrysalis, Cornerstone Benwell and Walking With.

She added: "A huge thank you to everyone who has supported me on my journey and contributed so generously to the three charities. The response has been so generous."

"The funds raised will greatly help the charities selected, enabling them to carry on making a difference for people less fortunate than ourselves."



Diana's pilgrimage took in Hadrian's Wall and other stunning locations

