

TOGETHER

The FREE magazine from the Diocese of Rochester | Issue 26 | August - October 2025

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COVER STORY: BRIDGING CULTURES, BUILDING COMMUNITY PAGE 8



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CONTENTS

Welcome to this edition of Together which has the theme of God's generous bounty running throughout.

In **Focus On** (pg 14) you can read about the fantastic work that has been taking place across the Diocese over the last year to grow faith and share the love of God, as we review the recently published Diocesan Annual Report and Accounts for 2024.

We also learn about the welcome and connection being grown and nurtured in Paddock Wood with newly arrived residents from Hong Kong (pg 8).

Meanwhile, our **Everyday Faith** (pg 26) item features Helen, whose love of plants has not only been raising funds for a good cause but is also helping her share the story of her faith and God's grace.

How to address global poverty is at the heart of our **Big Issue** (pg 18). As overwhelming as the problem seems, the Diocese's Poverty and Hope Appeal may offer a practical Christian response.

Finally, we look ahead to Creationtide in September, with a little help from the Diocese's Net Zero Team (pg 20).

Go well

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CHURCH SCHOOLS CELEBRATION



MESSY CATHEDRAL

FUN, FAITH AND MARKING MILESTONES

Celebrating the faith of young people has been at the centre of several recent events organised by the Diocese's Children and Young People Mission and Ministry Team.

From Messy Cathedral - a day of craft activities and worship as part of the national Thy Kingdom Come initiative - to the annual Church Schools' Celebration at which nearly 1,200 Year 6 students were welcomed to Rochester Cathedral from church schools across the Diocese. The team also supported the Bromley Schools' Festival held at Bromley Parish Church.



BROMLEY SCHOOLS FESTIVAL



HERE COMES THE BRIDE

To celebrate its 175th anniversary, St Paul's Church, Rusthall, put on a display of wedding dresses, all worn by brides at the church, from over the decades. The dresses were loaned, along with photographs and mementos, dating back to 1920. Flower bouquets were also made-up based on the flowers the brides had at the time.



DOWNLOAD FESTIVAL

The Rev Rob Byrne, Curate at Christ Church Tunbridge Wells and the Rev Anna Drew, Curate at Holy Trinity, Gillingham, were able to combine their love of music and God by joining the chaplaincy team at the recent Download Festival in Donington Park. "We're here to listen to people...and, if they like, pray with them and talk about Jesus."



THANKFUL FOR CHURCHWARDENS

Churchwardens across the Diocese have been admitted into their roles at a series of special services known as Archdeacons' Visitations. As one of the oldest forms of recognised lay ministry, the Archdeacons agree that this voluntary role is vital for the practical running and leadership of churches: "We want to thank each and every Churchwarden who gives their time and talents in service of God across the Diocese."



BUILDING FAITH ONE BRICK AT A TIME

Build a Church at All Saints, Langton Green, is a Lego-themed, family-focused worship service proving a great success despite its early 8am Sunday morning start. Bible stories and spiritual lessons are built, brick by brick, offering an interactive experience that sparks both spiritual imagination and biblical understanding. As one parent says, "It's given us a special moment each week to connect as a family through faith."



BISHOP JONATHAN VISITS ZIMBABWE

Bishop Jonathan Gibbs, the Bishop of Rochester, along with seven other members of the diocesan family, has visited the Diocese of Rochester's overseas link Diocese of Harare in Zimbabwe.

The visit to Zimbabwe was an opportunity to strengthen friendships between parish links, as well as a chance to learn more about the Harare Diocese's work with schools and children's homes.

Bishop Jonathan was also invited to preach at the main eucharist at the Bernard Mizeki Commemoration, an annual pilgrimage which draws around 20,000 people from across the five Anglican dioceses in Zimbabwe.

Reflecting on the visit and the friendship between the

two Dioceses, Bishop Jonathan said:

"The challenges faced by the church and the people of Zimbabwe are enormous. In this context, the Church is seeking to offer faithful Christian witness in the midst of a complex and difficult political and economic context.

"This is and must be very much a two-way relationship and we have much to learn from our Zimbabwean sisters and brothers, especially with regard to the depth of their faith and their resourcefulness in making the best use of often very limited resources.

Their generosity to us in this context was all the more remarkable and a great example and challenge to us."

WELLBEING OF CHURCH LEADERS AT HEART OF NEW DIOCESAN INITIATIVE

A new joint wellbeing initiative between the Diocese of Rochester and St Benedict's Centre in West Malling, has been launched.

Called Cascade, the project, which is funded for an initial five years, will focus on the flourishing and wellbeing of leaders in churches, schools, and some other settings within the Diocese, as it seeks to support them in their physical, relational, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

Speaking about the need for the initiative, Bishop Simon Burton-Jones, the Bishop of Tonbridge and Chair of the Cascade Steering Group, says:

"We envisage that the impact of this project will be like a dimmer light gradually coming on in peoples' lives so that, as we start to address some of the issues

that are most important to them, this light will start to emerge for them in different ways.

"As that happens, we'll find that it will have a real knock-on effect in their households, in their relationships within their churches, and in their communities."

With a project leader now in post, Cascade, is one of the first pieces of work to get underway as part of the Diocese's new vision and strategy. A period of consultation is now underway to help inform and shape the offer of the project.

Watch a short film about Cascade:





BRIDGING CULTURES, BUILDING COMMUNITY

New arrivals from Hong Kong have been given a warm welcome at St Andrew's Church, Paddock Wood.

When the UK government introduced the British National Overseas (BNO) visa scheme, in January 2021, it allowed many Hong Kong families to move to the UK in search of new beginnings.

Among the places they settled was Paddock Wood, near Tunbridge Wells, a town whose welcoming spirit has been embodied in the response of St Andrew's Church.

As new arrivals came with strong Christian roots and cultural traditions, St Andrew's Church saw an opportunity not just to welcome them, but to walk alongside them.

What began as hospitality soon grew into a deep and meaningful partnership with the Kent Chinese Christian Church (KCCC), now thriving in Paddock Wood.

Recognising the unique challenges facing Hong Kong migrants, St Andrew's Church made a deliberate decision to become part of the UKHK Welcome Churches network — a national initiative designed to help churches offer practical and pastoral support to new arrivals.

Through this, the church began running the 'UK Welcomes Hong Kong' course, helping newcomers understand life in the UK while also offering a space to build friendships and find community.

So far, more than 70 individuals have participated in these courses.

The relationship deepened through shared ministry and mutual encouragement. The Rev Bryan Knapp, now retired Vicar of St Andrew's Church, was

instrumental in opening doors both literal and spiritual.

"After 33 years of ministry, I've learnt to look for the doors God opens and walk through them, not always knowing what's on the other side."

He says it all began with a chance meeting:

"Meeting families from Hong Kong during Holy Week in a new housing development was one such door. St Andrew's Church and the community of Paddock Wood have been subsequently blessed by the contribution and partnership we are building."

Raymond and Ceci Woon, core team members of the Chinese church community, reflect on the journey: "Bryan opened the doors of St Andrew's Church to us, not just the building, but his belief in what we could do together as churches."

The Kent Chinese Christian Church now meets every Saturday in St Andrew's building, while many of its members also attend and serve at the Sunday services.

"Bryan opened the doors of St Andrew's to us, not just the building, but his belief in what we could do together as churches."



THE REV BRYAN KNAPP, MP MIKE MARTIN WITH PASTOR PATRICK CHEUNG

"Our weekends are full and joyful!" Ceci says. "It's very busy, but a real blessing."

A visible symbol of this partnership was the Chinese New Year Fair hosted at St Andrew's on 1 February 2025 — the second year of this collaborative celebration.

"It was a space to share stories, celebrate identity, and build connections."

The event brought in over 600 attendees and served as a vibrant expression of unity, culture, and faith.

For some, it was their first Chinese New Year in the UK; for others, it was their first experience of the

festival altogether. Behind the scenes, a dedicated team including Gladys, Ursula, Rebecca, Ceci, and Raymond made sure every detail reflected warmth and care, from lanterns to welcome leaflets.

Together, St Andrew's Church and KCCC exemplify the heart of the Gospel welcoming the stranger, honouring diversity, and worshipping together in unity.

The partnership shows that the Church is not just about buildings, but about people. People from different nations, cultures, and languages, finding common ground in Christ.

As Bryan says,

"Since 1851, St Andrew's Church has served the people of Paddock Wood. Today, through this new chapter with the Kent Chinese Christian Church, it continues to serve — not just as a parish church, but as a place of belonging and community for a global family."

For some, it was their first Chinese New Year in the UK; for others, it was their first experience of the festival altogether. It was a space to share stories, celebrate identity, and build connections.



KENT CHINESE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AT ST ANDREW, PADDOCK WOOD



GROWING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The Diocese's Annual Report and Accounts for 2024 are now available. Not only do they share the financial picture of the Diocese, but they also tell the exciting story of how the work of parishes and diocesan support teams is making an impact in the lives of the people they serve.

It's a report that Bishop Jonathan Gibbs, the Bishop of Rochester, says demonstrates the vibrancy of the people and places of the Diocese:

"Despite the many challenges we face, growth is happening and can happen still further."

He adds that it shows how the diocesan family is increasingly coming together and supporting one other in the implementation of the diocesan Vision and Strategy:

"Our shared diocesan vision is a hope-filled one and builds on the fantastic work already taking place in parishes and diocesan teams. It has been such an encouragement – and a real joy – to see how enthusiastically people have responded to the vision and how keen they are to engage with it."

The diocesan vision expresses how, as a family of faith across Medway, north and west Kent, and the London Boroughs of Bromley and Bexley, we are called together by God to change, serve, and grow with compassion, courage, and creativity.

This work is being focused around three objectives – growing missional churches, growing missional leaders and growing missional disciples. All of this work is being seen through the lens of growing safe and healthy cultures.

With the report highlighting the activity that has taken

place over the last year to help meet these objectives, Matthew Girt, Diocesan Secretary, says it is clear how much is already being achieved:

'The report makes clear that, when we channel our actions towards a common purpose and for the glory of God, we can change things for the better, and with our renewed diocesan vision, I am filled with hope for the future of God's kingdom in this Diocese.'

Head over to the centrespread to find out more about some of what has been achieved over the last year thanks to the generous financial contributions of parishes, alongside funds from the Diocesan Board of Finance.

Growing missional churches

The Diocese's Community Engagement and Social Action Adviser has continued to be on hand to work with parishes who would like to explore their outreach into the community, whether through a parish-driven initiative or through a partnership with an external organisation that is expert in responding to a particular social issue. A successful bid for £100,000 from the Colyer Fergusson Charitable Trust, has allowed churches to offer support to communities on issues such as parenting, health and wellbeing, addiction, money and debt advice, and youth advocacy. Other churches are exploring wellbeing, fitness, and sports initiatives to engage with people, such as movement classes, football, wellness walks, and gardening.

Growing missional leaders

In 2024, a former investment banker and a Taekwondo instructor were among the 16 people ordained deacon or priest into the Diocese. Seven people were also admitted and licensed as Lay Ministers to serve in parishes across the Diocese. Allowing young lives to be shaped and to flourish, through having the opportunity to encounter the love and goodness of Jesus Christ, is a key area of work for the Diocesan Children, Young People and Families Team. With over 70 engagement opportunities undertaken, from PCC visits, consultations with a parish about recruiting a dedicated CYPF Minister, to parish visits, six people have been recruited as CYPF Ministers to parishes, and some 25 young leaders have been trained and are now successfully serving in their parishes.

Growing missional disciples

Prayer and reflection are vital ways for people to grow in their personal relationship with God, and in confidence so they can use their faith to be a positive Christian influence in the world. To enable this, the Diocese's Spirituality Network has continued its work to support people with their spiritual lives, partnering with St Benedict's Centre in West Malling, to offer spiritual events, quiet days, and teaching days. The partnership has boosted the numbers of those attending and given a wider range of training possibilities for those interested in spirituality

Growing safe and healthy cultures

The day-to-day, diligent work of parishes, parish safeguarding officers, and the Diocesan Safeguarding Team has continued over the year, with 2260 people trained in basic and foundation safeguarding, and 179 out of 231 parishes using the Parish Dashboard to help them keep up to date with their safeguarding requirements. This year, too, more parishes than ever chose to mark Safeguarding Sunday, with activities ranging from prayer and reflection for victims and survivors of abuse, talks by Parish Safeguarding Officers, child-appropriate activities to help raise awareness of who to talk to if they need help, and addresses in parishes by the Diocesan Lead Safeguarding Adviser and also Bishop Jonathan.

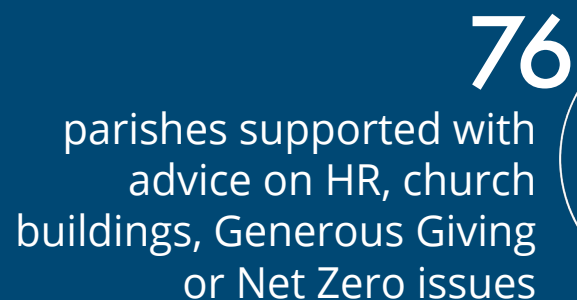
Read the full Annual Report and Accounts for 2024 at: www.rochester.anglican.org/about-us/annual-report-and-accounts



OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS

What has been spent and what has been achieved

In 2024, the total expenditure of the Diocese was £14.4 million. Thanks to the generosity of parishes, alongside contribution from the Diocesan Board of Finance, this is some of what has been supported and achieved through that partnership over the last year.



Diocese of Rochester Annual Report 2024. For full annual report visit
www.rochester.anglican.org/about-us/annual-report-and-accounts/

images from www.Vecteezy.com





ORDAINED DEACONS



ORDAINED PRIESTS

ORDINATION JOY!

This year thirteen people were ordained deacon or priest in two services that took place in Rochester Cathedral in June.

During the services, the Bishop of Rochester laid his hands upon the head of each candidate and prayed that, through the Holy Spirit, they would have the grace and power to fulfill their ministry.

Being ordained often follows a long journey of someone exploring their calling, of having their calling tested by the Church, and several years of training.

All of the ordinands bring a variety of talents and perspectives, adding to the diversity of the Diocese.

Reflecting on her ordination as deacon, Amanda Willmont said:

"We have a God of surprises. Five or six years ago

the prospect of ordained ministry was simply not on the agenda.

"I found faith as an adult, largely through the love and friendship of the toddler group at my then church.

"People from all walks of my life started asking if I had considered ministry, a good friend harried me onto a 'It's Your Calling' day, and my Vocations Advisor told me kindly but firmly to get out of my comfort zone and set my eyes on discernment for ordination.

"And here I am."

God has a plan for each and every one of us. It may be to ordained ministry, lay ministry, or living out our call in another way in our daily life. Explore how God may be calling you. Visit: www.rochester.anglican.org/everyday-faith/gods-plan-for-you/



DAILY BREAD: IS THERE ANY HOPE FOR TACKLING GLOBAL POVERTY?

We live in one of the richest countries in the world, although, even here, there are many families struggling to make ends meet. At least we know how we can respond, either by helping individuals we know directly or by supporting local foodbanks, homeless shelters, and other charities. But what about God's other seven billion children? Is it too big an issue to address? Peter Kettle, volunteer coordinator of the Diocese's Poverty and Hope Appeal, has an idea.

When we say the Lord's Prayer, most of us can skip over "Give us today our daily bread" without a thought. But in much of Africa, waking up with no food and little prospect of having any that day is a real challenge.

With weather patterns disrupted by climate change, food and water security is increasingly fragile. Furthermore, recent drastic cuts in international aid spending have made things much worse.

In Rochester's three Companion Dioceses in Africa, there have been droughts of varying intensity in four of the last five years. It has become common for the maize crops which provide people's staple diet to be either scorched and withered by the sun or washed away in floods. When churches in Rochester Diocese joined with brothers and sisters in Kondoa Diocese in Tanzania earlier this year in prayer, we prayed together for "good rains" – just enough to water the ground, but not a deluge to destroy the crop.

It would be understandable to think that we have enough problems of our own and that, while we may have huge sympathy, these are not our issues to solve – what difference can one person, one church, make anyway?

However, not helping those struggling in other countries is a false economy. Lifting people out of poverty elsewhere not only means ensuring the God-given dignity of all people, but also lessens the risk of geopolitical and economic instability.

Indeed, those cuts to foreign aid budgets mean that lots more people across the world are now at risk of poverty and injustice than this time last year.

This will eventually have a knock-on impact in our own country, whether through rising food prices, environmental damage, population movement, or international conflict.

Thankfully, in this Diocese, since 1977, the annual Poverty and Hope Appeal has provided a way to reach out to support the peoples of the world's poorest countries.

Currently donations by parishes and individuals are being used in Brazil, the Caribbean, Myanmar, Palestine, and Africa. In all of these places, small amounts of cash invested in sustainable projects run by trusted partners are bringing life-changing benefits.

Bishop Simon Burton-Jones, the Bishop of Tonbridge, who has particular oversight of the Appeal says, "Poverty and Hope is a diocesan appeal that acts like an antidote to hang-wringing despair. It helps to restore self-sufficiency to people who long for this.

"The saying 'every little helps' is no cliché here, it can save individual lives."

He is right, since 2022 over 40 per cent of proceeds from our annual Appeals have been used to help farming communities in Tanzania (Kondoa and Mpwapwa) and Zimbabwe (Harare).

In Kondoa the main focus of work has been on training in improved farming methods and this year, funds will go towards the production and distribution of drought-resistant seeds.

In Mpwapwa, initial funding went to solar powering of a repaired borehole and subsequently to micro-irrigation projects and the establishment of a loan fund for purchasing farm equipment.

In Harare four parishes and associated schools took part in a pilot project to diversify their incomes through bee-keeping and honey production. Earlier this year drought and economic crisis required help in establishing an emergency feeding programme in primary schools.

The important feature of all these efforts is that the initial injection of a modest amount of cash has brought substantial benefits.

You can make a difference.

So why not find out more about how the Appeal works? Just go to the Rochester Diocese website and search for 'Poverty and Hope'.

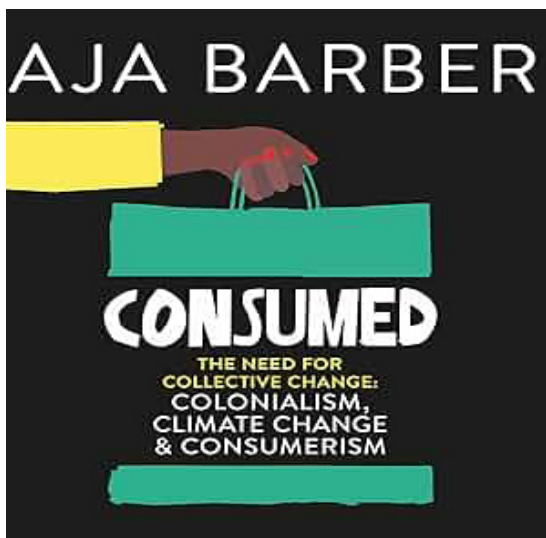
If you can, you may wish to donate – look out for the QR code at the front of this magazine or on a poster in church. Perhaps you could encourage your church to hold a Harvest Supper to raise funds or to invite someone like myself to come and speak about the appeal at a meeting or service?

Above all, please pray - for each of the projects you can read about on the website, for God's grace on those in need, and for generosity in support of the Appeal. Every little really does help.

RESOURCES – CREATIONTIDE

September sees the start of Creationtide, a time in the Church calendar dedicated to reflection on God as creator and sustainer of all life. It is also a time when, as Christians, we can focus on our role in caring for God's creation.

The Diocese's Net Zero Team has selected some of their favourite resources to help us grow in our knowledge of, prayer for, and support of, the environment in our day to day lives.



CONSUMED: The need for collective change; colonialism, climate change & consumerism

Author: Aja Barber
ISBN: 978-1914240041

A book about how to be a citizen not a consumer. In the 'learning' first half of the book, Aja exposes the reader to the endemic injustices in our consumer industries and the uncomfortable history of the textile industry; one which brokered slavery, racism, and today's wealth inequality. In the second 'unlearning' half of the book, she helps the reader with an understanding of the uncomfortable truth behind why we consume the way we do and challenges us take back ownership of our own consumerism because, she argues, the less we buy into the consumer culture the more power we have.



FIELD NOTES Podcast

Field Notes from A Rocha – a Christian organisation dedicated to climate care - explores the themes of conservation and hope through a wide lens. Hosted by Rick Faw and Jo Swinney, it unpacks the ideas, practice, and experience making a difference on the ground, through conversations with people who really know what they are talking about – from conservation scientists, explorers and biologists, to artists, entrepreneurs and theologians. They have hopeful stories to tell.

Find it at: www.arocha.org/en/field-notes-podcast/ or wherever you find your podcasts



CLIMATE CHANGE - The Facts

BBC iPlayer

After one of the hottest years on record, Sir David Attenborough looks at the science of climate change and potential solutions to this global threat. Interviews with the world's leading climate scientists explore recent extreme weather conditions such as unprecedented storms and catastrophic wildfires. They reveal what dangerous levels of climate change could mean for both human populations and the natural world in the future.

Visit www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/ and search 'climate change the facts'

ENVIRONMENTAL DAYS AND CAMPAIGNS

During Creationtide, there are several awareness days and campaigns which you may like to support to help focus your eco efforts.



FAIRTRADE FORTNIGHT

22 September to 5 October

A fortnight to celebrate the difference we can all make when we choose products that ensure a fair deal for producers.

Buying Fairtrade is getting easier to do with almost 5,000 Fairtrade products from coffee and tea to flowers and gold.

When you shop, look for the FAIRTRADE Mark.

www.fairtrade.org.uk



ZERO WASTE WEEK

1 to 5 September

A grassroots initiative to reduce what we put into landfill. Choose an action which will help you reduce your waste.

Pick a theme – popular ones in the past have been food waste, plastic packaging, and repair.

Then, **set a goal** – will you reduce your landfill waste by 10%? Banish food waste for two days? Or go all in and challenge yourselves to a completely waste free week?

www.zerowasteweek.co.uk



SECOND HAND SEPTEMBER

September

Oxfam's Second Hand September is an opportunity to take a stance against fast fashion and dress for a fairer world. It's also a good excuse to have a much-needed wardrobe clear-out.

Donating your pre-loved clothes gives them another life and raises vital funds to support Oxfam's partners around the world.

www.oxfam.org.uk/get-involved/second-hand-september

Download the Church of England's Environmental Calendar for more awareness days throughout the year. Scan the code for more information.



UPCOMING EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES



LEARNING BY HEART
St Benedict's Centre
18 SEPTEMBER 2025, 10AM-3PM

A workshop exploring the ancient practice of learning Scripture by heart. Participants are invited to bring a few favourite Bible verses to learn, and there will also be verses provided. Discuss why and how one might want to do this. The cost for the day is £25.

To book email: bookings@stbenedictscentre.org



BRAVE THE BRICKS | LEGO® WALK CHALLENGE
Rochester Cathedral
27 SEPTEMBER 2025, 10AM-4PM

Step up, summon your courage, and take on a challenge to raise funds! Brave the bricks in our family-friendly sponsored walk. Walk barefoot over thousands of LEGO® bricks. Whether you're walking solo or as part of a team, you'll raise sponsorship directly for Rochester Cathedral, or another charity of your choice, and every penny stays with your organisation. Registration fee £18.



CELEBRATING CREATION CARE
AT St Luke's Church, Maidstone
4 OCTOBER 2025, 9AM-12:30PM

A joint Eco Conference for Canterbury and Rochester. Be part of a morning of inspiration, collaboration, and action as we celebrate how churches and individuals can care for creation and lead the way toward a sustainable future. Open to all those interested in environmental stewardship. For more information contact netzero@diocant.org



IT'S YOUR CALLING
St John's Centre, Meopham
4 OCTOBER 2025

It's Your Calling is aimed at those exploring where God may be calling them. It looks at the gifts that God has given us all and at the biblical understanding of vocation. The day offers an opportunity to meet others on a similar quest and to take time to think what God's plan for you might be. For more information contact vocations@rochester.anglican.org



**Time
Lightshow**
by Luxmuralis

From 30 September
to 4 October 2025

Ticketed
event

Suitable for all
ages

More Information

www.rochestercathedral.org/lightshow



A HEART FOR OLDER PEOPLE

Julia Burton Jones is the Anna Chaplaincy Lead and Dementia Specialist for the Dioceses of Rochester and Canterbury. Ahead of World Alzheimer's Day on 21 September, we caught up with her to find out more about the dedicated ministry taking place within the Diocese to ensure the spiritual needs of older people are being met.

Can you explain a bit more about Anna Chaplaincy?

Anna Chaplaincy is a relatively new ministry that we have been pioneering here in the Diocese, named after the prophet Anna, who recognised the infant Jesus as the Messiah when he was presented in the temple. Anna was an older woman and Anna Chaplaincy focusses on offering spiritual care to older people of strong, little or no faith.

Who can be an Anna Chaplain?

Chaplains are commissioned and supported by their local church and may be in a paid or voluntary role, male or female, lay or ordained. They provide spiritual care particularly to people in the fourth age of life with frailty and dementia, whether they be living in their own homes, retirement housing or a care home.

How many Anna Chaplains are there in the Diocese?

We have around 40 Anna Chaplains, and nearly 30 Anna Friends, across the area of the Diocese. It's been wonderful to see this ministry grow since it was first established in 2017.

What attracted you to work on the needs of older people?

My interest in the twin issues of ageing and informal caring began at university in Bristol where I studied social administration and sociology in the mid-1980s. During my time as an undergraduate, my student community action was visiting a frail older woman in a nursing home opposite my church. Spending time with her was a formative experience.

How have ageing, dementia issues changed or developed throughout your work and life?

A key change is a demographic one. The pandemic shone a light on the experiences of isolated and housebound people in the UK and demonstrated the importance of communities working together to look after the most vulnerable members. We are seeing a greater openness to what churches can offer in responding to opportunities like social prescribing in reducing loneliness among older people.

Anna Chaplains are named after the widow, Anna, who appears with Simeon in Luke's gospel; both are good role models of faithful older people. Anna Chaplains are there for people of strong, little or no faith at all.

www.annachaplaincy.org

How has your approach to ageing developed as you have aged?

I have seen that we cannot know what our old age will bring, but that faith can be a source of resilience. I have learned that how we live in our middle years can influence health in later life.

What do you like doing when you're not working?

I enjoy reading contemporary fiction, listening to music, and watching documentaries and Scandinavian box sets on television to relax.

What makes you happiest?

Being with my close family and friends. Worshipping with Christians from all over the world, which for me is a foretaste of heaven.

What gives you hope for the future?

Seeing the kindness and generosity of other people who put the needs of others before their own.

Explore more about Anna Chaplaincy and the work that Julia Burton-Jones and her team do by visiting: www.annachaplaincy.org.uk



PLANTING SEEDS OF FAITH

For the last five years Helen Knight, a former teacher and member of St Francis Church, Strood, has been using her passion for plants to raise money to support young people in the Anglican Diocese of Kondoa with their education. It's a story she says is so rich with God's grace that she can't help but share it with others.

Some people call me the 'crazy plant lady'.

It all started before Covid when my church was sponsoring a child in Kondoa; Kondoa is one of Rochester Diocese's overseas companion links. The Sunday School I helped with did all the fundraising. They had bake sales, washed cars, put on a talent show.

Then, Covid hit, and everything stopped, and I thought, what can I do? We still need to send the money to support the children.

I had ten spider plants, and I thought, perhaps I could sell those? I never expected the response I received. Interest went through the roof.

I think during lockdown, nature became so important for so many people – soil is a natural anti-depressant – and I know my garden became my sanctuary. It met a need in people.

Initially, I sold at church and then I moved online to places like Facebook Marketplace. I began to propagate plants, so I had more to sell, and I turned them into gifts. I use mugs and jugs, teapots, sugar bowls, anything that will hold soil.

It has become a real cycle of people coming to buy plants, then coming back and donating mugs, or offering me cuttings. I quite often get grandma's china cabinet because the family don't want it, and it won't go in the dishwasher, but they are really happy to give it to me, and I can turn it into something beautiful and help a lot of children at the same time.

From one child, I'm now able to support ten, and I have raised just over £17,000. It is such a joy for me,

as a former teacher, to be able to help children get an education. In Tanzania, families work very hard to send a child to school, because if one child can get a good job, it can lift the whole family out of poverty. It is such a blessing to be able to do this through something I love.

From a very early stage I wanted people to know where their money was going and the reason why. I am telling this amazing story of how God has taken a few spider plants in mugs and turned it into something that is allowing so many children to go to school.

I have had evangelistic roles before, but this is the easiest and most natural story I have ever had to tell. For a start, it's so inspiring for me as evidence of God's provision but it is also inspiring for others to hear that God is at work through really simple things.

There are many times I say to people, this is my loaves and fishes story, because, whenever I think my stocks are getting a little bit low, some will turn up – a box full of mugs on my doorstep or a bag full of pots all washed, with lolly sticks for labels.

I've never been happier. I've never seen more evidence of God at work. Our God is awesome, and his provision is awesome.

He knows what I need to do this work before I do and the idea that God can take such a simple small idea and grow it into something so amazing is wonderful.

You can't argue with that, and with God, all things are possible.



Diocese of *Rochester*
called together

A PRAYER

God, creator of the universe,
Fill us with your love for the creation,
for the natural world around us,
for the earth from which we come
and to which we will return.

Awake in us energy to work for your world;
let us never fall into complacency, ignorance, or
being overwhelmed by the task before us.
Help us to restore, remake, renew.

Amen