

We celebrated ministry of our Anna Chaplains

WE celebrated the ministry of Anna Chaplaincy across our diocese with an inaugural network event and Candlemas service in our cathedral.

Those involved with this crucial ministry of spiritual development with older people gathered for an afternoon in our cathedral nave, followed by a Candlemas service at which they dedicated themselves to serve in this way.

Anna Chaplains are named after the widow Anna who saw the infant Jesus and recognised him as the Messiah, alongside Simeon in the Temple. This ministry has been developed by the Christian charity BRF and involves licensed Anna Chaplains visiting the elderly in their homes and in care homes to offer spiritual care.

Bishop Jonathan has made Anna Chaplaincy one of his main priorities, and wants to create a network of Anna Chaplains across our diocese. In the past year, dozens of Anna Chaplains have been trained and licensed, alongside others who work in support as Anna Friends.

Coleen Jackson and the Rev Samantha Martell, who jointly chair our diocese's Anna Chaplaincy steering group, gathered all those involved at our cathedral for an afternoon of training, sharing stories and networking. Former Meridian TV presenter Debbie Thrower, who was appointed as the very first Anna Chaplain 13 years ago in Alton, was among those speaking.

Our Anna Chaplains and Anna



Anna Chaplains and Anna Friends gather around the altar in our cathedral with Bishop Jonathan and Debbie Thrower (wearing blue scarf)

Friends then re-dedicated themselves to their roles during the cathedral's Candlemas service, which recalls the presentation of Jesus at the Temple. Debbie Thrower preached, unpacking the Biblical story and explaining how today's Anna Chaplains have both a pastoral and prophetic role in a society where those aged over 60 now outnumber those aged under 18 for the first time.

She said: "Anna Chaplains are inspired by the example of Anna and Simeon to do this work. Some are paid, the majority are volunteers, and they are men and women, lay and ordained. We now have 272 licensed Anna Chaplains across the UK and hundreds of Anna Friends. They offer spiritual care to those in later life, irrespective of whether they go to church.

"This story shows that God uses those who the world deems as 'past

it' to do his work. They can recognise the new direction that society has to take."

Anna Chaplains and Anna Friends gathered around the altar at the end of the service with lighted candles to symbolise their commitment. They processed to the cathedral's font with Bishop Jonathan to recall their own baptismal vows. The candles were extinguished in the nave, to symbolise the fact that the light of Christ goes with us into the world.

Our first Anna Chaplain, Anne Powell, was licensed on the Isle of Wight in 2021, and the second, Coleen Jackson, was licensed in April 2022 on the mainland. The plan is to have an Anna Chaplain in every parish, benefice and cluster in our diocese.

For more details, see: www.portsmouth.anglican.org/anna