

Reviving spiritual life is key for future



The Rev Neil Smart, our new Lead for Revive, explains why our strategy depends on inspiring and encouraging our leaders

It is significant that the first part of our strategy of rejuvenation is to revive the spiritual leadership of our diocese. This goes back to the fundamental truth that we can't share what we don't have.

As the newly-appointed Lead for Revive I know that there have been times in my ministry when events and issues have conspired to drain me of energy and enthusiasm. To journey through life without any bumps or brutal uphill sections is completely unrealistic. Life is hard. Not just for clergy. Yet the stresses involved in leading either small rural parishes or big city church teams are not to be underestimated. I've had lots of experience of both.

The fundamental point of Revive is to see flourishing clergy and lay leaders with a faith that enables them to reach out in mission and evangelism. It seeks to take seriously the pressures that our church leaders face, for the diocese to be there to equip, enable and encourage them in their roles.

Central to this are Cairns. When you're walking up a mountain, cairns are places which help us to stop, meet and check our bearings as we journey together. That's also true of our spiritual life together.

So we've created 'Cairns' of clergy and lay leaders in this diocese. Each Cairn will seek to pray, eat and study together to build resilient

relationships that boost clergy wellbeing. They will come in two formats but both seek to see the benefits of peer group support embedded across all clergy.

Nine 'Pilot Cairns' have already been formed and launched, three in each archdeaconry. These have a specific task with a programme provided by the central diocesan strategy team.

'Cairns are places to stop, meet and check our bearings for the journey'

Each will have financial support provided by the central funding grants for projects that are formed through their work with specific resources together. In this they will be supported by and accountable to our strategy team.

But more widely we will be encouraging all clergy to come together in Cairns that can support their ministry locally. There will be central support but we hope that these Cairns will form naturally, offering spiritual sustenance to all who take part. They will be a place to share and to explore spiritual disciplines and practices. This will be explained more fully across the deaneries so that everyone has the chance to join in.

The Revive strand will also focus on clergy wellbeing and training. Our diocese had a tough time through the Covid pandemic and we will develop a raft of resources to ensure that clergy have the very best pastoral care. As the Lead for Revive, I'll actively seek to listen and support the clergy in the stresses and strains that they face.

Bishop's Study Days are already being planned with a Clergy Conference set for September 2026. These times together are more than just opportunities to learn fresh insights into our faith and how to put it into action. We will seek to increase our sense of belonging to and sharing in the vision of our diocese.

The team are also planning one-hour webinars on practical topics that clergy can dip into. We've consulted on which topics will be helpful for our leaders. I'll also work with the Warden of Readers and seek to strengthen the spiritual direction network for our diocese.

In all of this we are seeking to become devoted disciples of Jesus. As we abide in Him we will be able to live fruitful lives enabling those around us to experience something of the abundant life that He seeks to bring to all. Please keep all of these initiatives in your prayers asking His Holy Spirit to equip us all for the good works that He has prepared for us.