

Hampshire from 2010, and the network was expanded by the charity Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF). There are now more than 220 Anna Chaplains working across the country. Anna Chaplains are named after the faithful widow Anna, who appears in the Bible recognising the baby Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah.

As Bishop Jonathan began his work as our bishop, he outlined a vision to see Anna Chaplains in every parish, benefice or neighbourhood of our diocese, to ensure that the elderly within our local communities are cared for spiritually. Anne was quickly joined by Coleen Jackson, a Reader from Blendworth, Chalton and Idsworth, who became our diocese's first Anna Chaplain on the mainland in May.

The bishop asked Coleen and the Rev Samantha Martell, team vicar in North Gosport, to lead a strategy group to develop Anna Chaplaincy across the diocese. In June and July, information sessions were held for those interested in finding out more.

The first training sessions will be held in September, with the idea of having 20 Anna Chaplains in place by the end of 2022. Those who have missed out can apply and receive training in the autumn and New Year.

From September, each deanery has been asked to nominate an 'advocate' to attend the strategy group, so they can help to shape what Anna Chaplaincy looks like. It has been made clear that the diocese isn't providing a blueprint for how to do Anna Chaplaincy, but rather a framework that allows individual churches and their Anna Chaplains to develop whatever is right for their own community.

Among other things, we

Simple reflections at the heart of our Anna Chaplaincy ministry

WHEN Coleen Jackson visited elderly residents in Wisteria Lodge and Pear Tree Court care homes, she brought in scallop shells.

As part of the informal services she led on spiritual journeys, she asked them to take a shell and trace their fingers around it, as an act of reflection. Some were so moved, they took the shell back to their rooms as a keepsake.

It's those kind of simple spiritual reflections that are at the heart of Anna Chaplaincy – finding something that will help an elderly person make a genuine connection with God.

Coleen has been visiting three care homes in Horndean as part of her role as Anna Chaplain for Blendworth, Chalton and Idsworth. She has also seen some individuals in their own homes.

"My role brings me into contact with older people who have wonderful stories to tell, and it is a privilege to walk alongside them in their spiritual journey," she said.

"What I do varies from one care home to another, but it involves taking services which I try to make informal. They choose their favourite hymns, and everyone loves the Lord's Prayer and the Grace. I learnt that it was



Coleen Jackson with resident Diane at Wisteria Lodge care home, Horndean

important to provide takeaway service sheets, as they all like to reflect on them in their rooms and show their relatives.

"Occasionally I am asked to go in and pray for one of the residents in a specific way, or for a new resident to bless their rooms. I can also offer Communion if requested.

"Much of what I do is not out of the ordinary, but I have discovered that it is in these moments that the extraordinary happens, and I feel God is using my gifts as I minister to each person.

"What has delighted me is that our services have grown from a handful of people to sometimes 16, and include staff when they can come along. This has created something like a home church."

The Anna Chaplaincy model is developing in this benefice. The next stage is to appoint some Anna Friends – volunteers who work alongside an Anna Chaplain for a limited number of hours each week.

This autumn, they'll be offering 'Messy Vintage' sessions, art, craft and fun sessions along

are looking to pilot what 'inter-generational' or 'multi-generational' activities might look like – bringing our young people and older generations together.

In November Bishop Jonathan will confirm his roadmap for the diocese and how he expects Anna Chaplaincy to take shape over the next three to five years. Among the ideas is an annual service of thanks for Anna Chaplaincy, perhaps at Candlemas.

Anna Chaplaincy founder and pioneer Debbie Thrower said:



Above: Coleen Jackson with residents Audrey Colwell, Sheila Hawes, Joyce Gurney and Ruth Swainsbury at Pear Tree Court care home in Horndean; right: Coleen with Margaret Horestead at Pear Tree Court

the style of Messy Church that can be used with older people.

Coleen said: "In working and worshipping with staff, residents and their families, I try to make sure they understand they are part of our church family. They receive our weekly pew sheet, where we include them in our prayers. They have an ongoing invitation to attend services or social events.

"Our next challenge is to find ways to meet with older folk in the community who live alone, and for whatever reason no longer feel able to come to church, or who have never been but would like to explore their spiritual journey."



its top priorities in every parish.

"It's so exciting not only seeing Anna Chaplaincy being regarded as a trusted and authoritative voice in this sphere, but also the way more and more people are discerning their vocation to supporting older people in this way."

For more information about Anna Chaplaincy in our diocese, or to apply to become one, see www.portsmouth.anglican.org/anna. For information and resources from BRF, see www.annachaplaincy.org.uk.



Bishop Jonathan with Debbie Thrower and Coleen Jackson at Coleen's licensing at St Michael's, Chalton, in May