



Clergy and lay leaders from the Western Wards share breakfast

We'll study, eat, pray and lament together

ONE of the key elements of our new diocesan strategy is to make sure our clergy and lay leaders are inspired and sustained as vibrant disciples. The **REVIVE** part of our strategy envisages them forming small groups to eat, laugh, learn, lament and pray together. They can offer each other support and theological study within these groups. One part of our diocese where that's already working is the Western Wards of Fareham. Those who lead our churches in Hook-with-Warsash, Sarisbury Green, Titchfield and Locks Heath meet once a fortnight for breakfast, which includes prayer for each other. The desire for clergy to work collaboratively led to the four parishes forming a 'covenanted partnership', which also involves joint services, prayer meetings and other activities. The Rev Mike Terry, joint vicar of St Mary's, Hook-with-Warsash, said: "Geographically, we are fairly cohesive and we've been meeting regularly as clergy and lay leaders since Kairos 20 years ago. It was especially important when parishes were in

vacancy, as churchwardens felt supported. "We didn't want to become a 'super-parish' and so embraced the idea of a covenanted partnership, which was approved by all PCCs. We hold Alpha Courses and evening services together, and we've now held two covenant partnership services. We hold lightly to parish boundaries." For new clergy arriving, such as the Revs Luiz Lima and Penny Thatcher, the group has been a godsend. Luiz, from St John's, Locks Heath, said: "I knew how valuable this group would be as fellowship and in strengthening our leadership. And I can see that it has helped during interregnums." And the Rev Janet Trevithick from St Peter's, Titchfield, said: "We've been finding opportunities to work together, including retreats and spirituality days, and Messy Church." One of Bishop Jonathan's suggestions is that groups such as this one pilot a new approach, perhaps jointly studying a mission resource such as 'Divine Renovation', or similar material.

Pathways into new faith

OUR diocesan strategy also hopes to inspire our parishes to dream up ways in which those without faith can become new disciples of Jesus. The **REVITALISE** part of that strategy involves helping parishes to create a culture in which there are clear pathways into faith and discipleship. That might involve encouraging church members to *engage* with the world, then to *evangelise* about their faith in words and deeds. They can then *establish* disciples centred on Jesus and subsequently *equip* those new disciples for mission. In practice, that might involve hosting events or activities for local communities that meet a proven need, such as toddler groups, youth groups or lunches for the elderly. Then the pathway might involve inviting such people to Alpha Courses, Sunday services or evangelistic events where they'll hear the good news. And finally giving them the opportunity to join smaller Bible study groups where they can develop as disciples. That's what happens at St Jude's Church, Southsea, where initial contact with those in the community often comes when they throw open their doors for a free cream tea or family fun day - or to offer hot dogs during the switch-on of Southsea's Christmas lights. Associate minister the Rev Neil Smart said: "At St Jude's, we try to be intentional about giving people a pathway to make their way into membership of the church. "There's got to be places where people can initially link up with church. That's our first aim. Then they encounter Jesus at some event or



Families hear about church activities as they eat in the garden of St Jude's Church during the Southsea Food Festival

service, and then we want them to grow in the faith and become followers of Jesus. "It's too much to expect someone to sign up for Alpha straight from the street, so you need to see it as a process or a pathway. So we have these link events each term, which means they feel welcome at church. "We've had a comedy night that people invited friends to, and we opened our garden while Southsea Food Festival was taking place so people could come and enjoy their food. And everyone who meets and greets visitors has information about the next thing to invite people to, where the good news of Jesus will be explained." Other projects that aim to revitalise our parishes include Choir Church, which was featured in the last edition of @CofE Portsmouth magazine, and a drive to enhance our work with children and young people by receiving training from the charity Youthscape.

that we face as a diocese: declining attendances, older congregations, expensive buildings, over-stretched staff, and a gap between the costs of our ministry and our income.

That strategy therefore encapsulates four key areas:

- to **REJUVENATE**, creating thriving churches with a lower age profile and where families can thrive;
- to **REVIVE** the spiritual leadership in our diocese, so that clergy and lay leaders are vibrant disciples;
- to **REVITALISE** our churches and create pathways by which church members invite others to embrace our faith and become disciples themselves;
- and to **RENEW** the Church by planting new congregations and worshipping communities.

Our experience of church plants in this diocese includes the creation of Harbour Church in Portsmouth in 2016 with a small group from St Peter's, Brighton, and its further



planting of new congregations into churches in Portsmouth and Gosport in subsequent years. Local churches have also planted new congregations into St Margaret's, Southsea, and into St Mary's, Rowner.

Our most recent church plant is a new contemporary congregation in All Saints, Ryde, as part of a plan to

renew churches across the Isle of Wight.

Future **RENEW** plans include new congregations planted at other locations across the diocese, in areas identified by each deanery as needing that fresh spark.

One idea is that a team could be gathered at St John's Church, Fareham, to plant a new congregation in nearby St Peter and St Paul parish next year. That might ultimately pave the way for the creation of a new church in Welborne, the new development being built to the north of Fareham.

Meanwhile, the emphasis on **REJUVENATE** isn't just about enhancing our work with children, families and young people.

The vital work of our Anna Chaplains in promoting the spiritual welfare of older people in care homes and the community will

continue, as will our parish ministry to older people in our existing congregations. But clergy and lay leaders will also be invited to embrace mission initiatives that might appeal to those who are 10 or 20 years younger than their existing congregations too.

The whole strategy is based on our diocese's overall vision, which has now been articulated by Bishop Jonathan as: 'We aim to be a rejuvenating community of Jesus-centred, Kingdom-seeking disciples.'

In order to fund this work, our diocese is working towards a bid for strategic funding from the national Church of England. Our bid will be submitted in September and a decision will be made by the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board on October 31. If successful, that funding will support this work over the next five years.

You can read more about our vision and strategy, and read case studies on www.portsmouth.anglican.org/strategy.