

On the vine



A Longer Read: Transforming Lives and Communities

Over the last few months we have been reflecting on our refreshed Renewing Hope vision, which was affirmed at the Diocesan Synod on the 29th Feb. The 3rd of 3 priority areas within our refreshed vision is 'Transforming Lives and Communities'.

The American management consultant Peter Drucker said, 'The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence itself, but to act with yesterday's logic.'

It remains too early to fully comprehend and make too many conclusions about how life is going to look and feel, post-corona. What we can be sure of, is that through this experience the future will look and feel different to the past. How we respond to this challenge will be important. The quote from Peter Drucker highlights the potential dangers of simply falling back on what we once knew or have only known, but what if new opportunities and possibilities emerge that will no longer sit comfortably within our existing structures, relationships and ways of doing life, church, mission and ministry?

At the heart of the Gospel is an invitation to a life of transformation, as we step more fully into the life of discipleship, so our hearts and minds are transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ. As St Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3: 18 'And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.'

As we experience these moments of transformation in ourselves, the outworking is seen and experienced in the life of the wider community. Take our Community Hubs for example. Community Hubs are a model of partnership working that seeks to build on the relationship between the local church, school and other local agencies. Community Hubs build a vision for the future that emerges for discussion with children and young people as they share their hopes and fears. From this, areas of work, mission and ministry begin to form, relationships deepen, trust builds, and transformation begins to take place, it's usually quite small at first but gradually it builds. This has most recently happened in Bridport, the strength of community partnership centred on the church, and the school is already beginning to bear fruit.

Devizes would be another example of where the local church has been at the centre of a community's response to the coronavirus. One person's email prompting Vicar Keith Brindle to 'get the church together and do something about COVID-19' has led to over 1000 people (at the time of writing) being helped within that community. Not only that, but their example impacted the strategic response of Wiltshire Council to mobilise volunteers to help manage the local response. It's the power of transformed lives impacting others for the glory of God.

The Community Kitchen in Blandford Forum is another example. Launched during Holy Week of 2018, the Community Kitchen serves free hot meals during the school holidays. Since its launch they have served over 3,000 meals to people of all ages and walks of life. People and families who

are drawn together through an invitation to come and eat together. In that place and around those tables, relationships are formed, food is shared, bread is broken, Jesus is made known and lives are changed. This goes right back to the heart of the Gospel itself.

There are many other wonderful examples from around the Diocese of churches and schools finding creative ways to impact the life of their community and bringing transformation and offering a vision of hope.

Therefore, as a Diocese we aim to help churches, schools and communities focus on the transforming lives and communities by committing to:

- Working together to strength our local centres of mission: benefice, deanery and other groupings, enabling local decision making and resourcing to impact the lives of each locality
- Further develop our network of Community Hubs where parishes, schools, household and other local partnerships work creatively together to imagine a better future for their community
- Encouraging and promoting participation across the diocese in issues of social justice to grow the Kingdom of God and to set the captives free
- Being strong and courageous advocates, hearing and acting on the voices of children, young people and adults
- Reflecting on the impact of the Coronavirus and allowing our shared experiences to shape our future understanding and priorities of mission and ministry
- Partnering with other like-minded organisations and institutions across a wider geographical area in developing the work of mission and ministry, influencing and being a voice for the common good at local, regional and national levels.

Over the coming weeks we will be developing further resources and support around each of the priority areas. In doing so, we are seeking to invite you to take this journey with us. To share ideas, resources, stories, as well as encouraging church and school leadership teams to work together in new ways, to engage in wider community discussion to help to shape and create a future that increasingly reflects the Kingdom of God, transforms lives and the communities in where we pray, serve and grow.