

# Chester

## Diocesan News

February 2019

News, features, jobs...  
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Growing stronger parishes

## Lampstand lights the way forward



One of my more unusual Christmas presents was a small brass Menorah (candlestick with seven lights) given to me by someone who kindly prays for me. The candlestick or lampstand as it is described in the Book of Exodus (Ex 25:31-40) became a symbol of the Jewish nation, and its most famous depiction is on the Arch of Titus in Rome built to celebrate the destruction of Jerusalem and her Temple, the Temple in which the Lord Jesus was presented (2 Feb) in which the original Menorah stood.

If you want to know why the Menorah (or Lampstand as it is described in scripture) has had such significance for me over the last year, you can go to <https://bit.ly/2VokTqj> to read details of two talks I gave in Wales about the

significance of the Lampstands in the Book of Revelation (chapters 1-3) and how they have helped me understand what is going on in the Church today. According to Revelation, the lampstands now are the Church in her different localities, and Jesus is walking among the lampstands knowing what is going on and expressing a view!

I am finding that picture helpful as the ongoing challenge of listening to the Spirit in the Word of God continues for us, not in the culture of ancient Rome, but in the culture of 21st Century modernity (or is it post modernity?).

In February we also remember Valentine (14th), a virtually unknown martyr, perhaps a priest or bishop killed in Rome in 269 AD; as far as we know there is no reason why he should be particularly associated with romantic love, but that association, and his martyrdom, encourages me to ask for the light of the Lord to shine on our culture's fascination with and dedication to that love. George Herbert (who we also remember in February 27th) in his exquisite poem "Love" takes us to that encounter with Love in the Lord Jesus which should define and refine all our loves. A love which, as the Feast of the Presentation reminds us, begins with Jesus' birth, and takes us to his cross, and shines as the light of the world.

**+Keith**

## Bishop Libby is next Bishop of Derby



On the 18th December it was announced that Bishop Libby Lane will be the next Bishop of Derby. Bishop Libby is currently the Bishop of Stockport, a post she has occupied since 2015.

Bishop Libby says: "I am thrilled to have been appointed as the next Bishop of Derby. I am excited about starting my ministry there and for getting to know all the people, places and parishes that will be a part of it. I have had a wonderful time in the Diocese of Chester and I will miss it greatly. I won't be leaving right away and hope to have time to properly say farewell before I take up my new post."

Bishop Peter Forster, the Bishop of Chester said: "Libby has had a splendid ministry in the Diocese of Chester, and most notably over the past four years as Bishop of Stockport. We will miss her very much, but she will be an excellent

Bishop of Derby as she takes her exceptional gifts to this wider ministry in the Church."

The Ven Ian Bishop, Archdeacon of Macclesfield said: "Bishop Libby is rooted in prayer that has grown out of a living and vibrant faith in Christ. All of her many qualities have formed a gifted leader in the Church of God and I know she will lead the Diocese of Derby with courage and energy. Whilst I am personally sad not to be working closely with her in the future, these are exciting times for Libby and the Diocese of Derby."

A farewell service is due to take place at Chester Cathedral. Check the diocesan website for details. Planning is underway to appoint Libby's successor and further details will be made available in due course.

## Church weddings without the expense



***The Revd Mike Smith marrying a couple at St John's***

The Grand Wedding is an initiative by St John's Church, Hartford, to encourage couples to tie the knot and start married life unburdened by the huge expense associated with weddings.

Thanks to a team of talented volunteers the church is offering to arrange the full day for a mere fraction of the average national cost.

The Revd Mike Smith, who has been marrying couples at St John's since 2004, explained: "According to national reports, the average cost of a wedding in the UK is £30,000. It can be an enormous burden for people starting out in their married life.

"I have known people struggle with the stress of getting into debt because of these costs, but I've also known the costs to put people off getting married.

"At St John's, we believe that lifelong

marriage between a man and a woman is God's good gift to all and that no-one should be denied simply because of cost. In our Grand Wedding, you have to provide your own clothes, but we'll do the rest and give you a great day."

A church wedding is a legal Christian ceremony where people are usually married by banns. It currently costs £854 to get married at St John's Church, which covers the expense of reading of the banns, the certificate, the vicar, organist, and bell ringers, plus the use of the church itself.

St John's Grand Wedding offer is centred on a full church wedding and includes a two-tier personalised wedding cake, digital photographs, invitation and service stationery, flowers, and a dress alteration service if the bride purchases a second hand or off-the-peg dress.

The package also includes a catered reception in the Church Centre for up to 30 guests including a two-course meal with an option to add a further 20 guests at pro-rata cost.

The church has set three dates for 2019, one of which has already been booked. The remaining two will be offered on a first come first served basis and are subject to the usual legal requirements for getting married in church. One of the services will be conducted by the Bishop of Birkenhead, Bishop Keith Sinclair.

Revd Mike is hopeful the initiative will be a success and is keen to encourage couples to get in touch if the cost of getting wed in a church is a cause of concern.

He said: "If having a church wedding is truly important to you and your faith, but the cost is putting you off getting married, come and talk to me."

# Restoring lives broken by divorce

The Government wants to make divorce easier. Do we bemoan the watering down of what should be a lifelong commitment for “better or worse”, or be encouraged that people can now more easily break free from a loveless marriage?

The good news is that divorce rates for opposite-sex couples in England and Wales are at their lowest level since 1973, which is around forty per cent lower than their peak in 1993. However, there will still be an estimated 100,000 divorces in 2019, of which an increasing number will be among older people. How should the Church respond?

Mark and Helen Tomlinson of St Mary's Cheadle got married after they both reluctantly experienced painful divorces. Mark and Helen both hold on to Romans 8 v28 as a source of inspiration: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

Today they are finding ways to turn a painful experience into something that can help others.

Mark says: “After 23 years of happy marriage, my wife returned from a trip to Australia to see an elderly friend and revealed to me that she was having an affair and wanted a separation.”

“Over the next two years we tried counselling; I wanted her to show some repentance, it never came. I would have stayed with her for the rest of my life because of the vows I took when I married her, but I knew I had to move on, despite the inevitable sadness. We got divorced in 2007.”

Helen's experience was similar: “I was married for over 20 years, but it was

always a marriage of compromise. He had an affair and chose to leave me. The rejection was very hard and very painful to go through.”

They say they both know what betrayal and deceit feels like and that it was their faith, family and church family that helped them deal with the pain of separation and divorce. God was their strength.

Helen says: “If you know the pain of divorce and betrayal, then God could use you to help others. I had to go through a bitter, complex financial battle. I was frightened and was expecting the worst. I said, ‘God please, I put this in your hands.’ Thankfully I came out of it OK in the end.”

Helen and Mark met many years later after mutual friends introduced them to one another. Their blossoming friendship grew into something more over time. They travelled together on a Christian mission trip to Kenya in 2014 and it was here that Mark proposed, convinced of God's involvement and that it was his will for them to be together. They married a year later.

Now living together with a blended family, they are making the most of their God-given experiences to turn pain into loving service for others.

“We wanted to use the experiences and the pain we'd been through to help others,” Helen says. “Despite being broken by divorce, we can see that God was with us. He put others who had experienced the same difficulties into our paths for us to heal and support.”

Knowing their background, one of their ministers asked whether they would give some thought to doing something for those going through



divorce and separation. There didn't seem to be anything out there in a formal sense.

Mark says: "I remember that we prayed a lot for God's guidance of how to approach this challenge. Of course, it's always OK to say kindly to someone, 'I know how you feel', but it's very different when you truly have experience of it...the difference of how powerful that is; experience changes the way you can talk to people."

Filled with confidence from this encounter and opportunity to help someone in need, Mark and Helen continued to pray together and grow with God.

"We were praying one Sunday morning and then this advert in a Christian magazine just kind of jumped out at us," Helen says. Exploring it further, they discovered Holy Trinity Brompton, an Anglican church in London best known for creating the Alpha course and the Marriage Course, had developed a course called Restored Lives designed specifically for those facing divorce and separation and offering a future with hope.

Helen says: "We approached our ministers and explained where we thought God was calling us to. Our church family were very supportive and offered to pay for us to attend the conference and the training. From attending the conference to running the course in our parish church took 18 months."

Helen says her background in nursing and pastoral conversations, and Mark's gift for administration and leadership skills have helped them along the way. They are a complementary match.

Mark says: "God has made running this course easy. He has put people in our pathway who have expertise to share, and experience of the pain of

divorce and separation. The team has been truly amazing. We came across and contacted Christians Against Poverty (CAP) for advice on budgeting, family workers have come to help with family communication, and if any major issues arise, we always have details of relevant professionals to signpost people to."

The course is for people going through separation or divorce and is offered to people of all backgrounds, whether they have faith or not.

"The course has a biblical foundation but isn't evangelistic. We're open about our faith and we pray for the people we meet, but there is not a requirement to have faith to attend. We simply want to support people who are going through what we went through; we want to share our story and help others." Mark says.

Mark and Helen completed their first course last November, where they had 14 attendees. All responded positively about how the course had helped them to cope with their personal situations and move forward with hope. They will be running their second course in May/June 2019.

There are regular conferences in London for anyone who is considering running the course in their own parish. Mark and Helen say that it's their experiences that have enabled them to help others. Helen says, "the support network at Restored Lives is brilliant, but you need first-hand experience of separation and divorce otherwise your credibility might take a hit. If you know the pain of divorce and betrayal, then God can still use you."

**Find out how to run your own course:**  
**<https://www.restoredlives.org/run-divorce-recovery-course>**

## New guidance for gender transition services

New guidance for parishes planning services to help transgender people mark their transition has been published by the Church of England. However, the Bishop of Birkenhead has joined others to express “concern” about the guidance.

The pastoral guidance, which will be incorporated into Common Worship, encourages clergy to be “creative and sensitive” in using liturgy to enable people to mark a major transition in their lives.

It formally commends the incorporation of the existing rite for the Affirmation of Baptismal Faith into services which mark gender transition.

It details how elements including water and oil can be incorporated into the service and, crucially, makes clear that trans people should be addressed publicly by their chosen name.

The guidance adds, that the occasion should have a distinct “celebratory character”.

The document - approved by the House of Bishops - follows a motion adopted at General Synod in 2017 recognising the need for transgender people to be welcomed and affirmed in churches.

However, the formal incorporation of a transgender service has been questioned by some in the Church of England, including the Bishop of Birkenhead, Keith Sinclair. He says he

has concerns with the guidance and is supporting the Church of England Evangelical Council's request for clarification and review.

Bishop Keith says: “I share the concerns and questions expressed by the CEEC Working Group and Officers in their statement about the House of Bishops Guidance and support their requests for clarification and review. I also agree with the Bishop of Maidstone's comments on his website about the Guidance and his support for any move that will change its status so that it is seen as a contribution to the ongoing Living in Love and Faith (LLF) project, rather than the finished product of the House.”

The LLF project is commissioned by the House of Bishops with the purpose of exploring how relationships, marriage and sexuality fit within the bigger picture of humanity. The LLF project aims to explore these matters by studying what the Bible, theology, history and the social and biological sciences have to say. It involves bringing together many minds, voices, areas of expertise and different skills.

One of the stated goals of the LLF project is to produce a set of resources by early 2020. The hope is that the resources will be used at the Lambeth Conference in July 2020.

## Do you have a communications role in your parish?

Do you edit the parish magazine or look after your church's website or Facebook page? The communications team at Church House are looking to help parishes develop their communications by providing the training and tools

you need. If you are involved in parish communications, or would like to be, please email your details to [comms@chester.anglican.org](mailto:comms@chester.anglican.org)

# Celebrating different abilities

On Saturday 09 March, Chester Cathedral will host a special service with one simple aim: to celebrate the abilities of all people. Organised by the diocesan Disability Forum, the service is designed to be as accessible and inclusive as possible.

Engagement and Inclusion Officer in the Diocese of Chester, Vanessa Layfield says that everyone, regardless of ability, is welcome and encouraged to attend.

"The service will be a colourful and creative celebration. We want everyone to feel welcome, included and valued. It will be a service that celebrates all abilities."

The service will showcase the different creative treatments that parishes can employ to make all people feel welcome. This includes sensory prayer stations, large print and Braille service sheets, a signing choir, hearing loops, and guaranteed wheelchair access. Vanessa says that she hopes local parishes will feel inspired to think differently about how they respond to people with different abilities.

Vanessa says: "I don't think the Church as a whole takes on board the needs of people with disabilities as well as it could. I'm sure most people would agree that our churches are not always the most accessible to those with limited mobility, and it is still rare for a church to

offer signed services or service sheets in Braille and large print. We are improving, but there is still a long way to go."

The Revd Mark Turner is the curate at Eastham, and chaplain of Birkenhead School, and will be part of the service. He identifies as having a "disability", although it is "hidden" to those that don't know him well. He says: "I wanted to be involved because it is important to highlight the variety of abilities and disabilities we have in this world. Some are obvious, others not so, but no matter what, God loves each of us and we are all his children, made in his image. The service will be a cause for celebration!"

The Diocese of Chester has previously run an 8-week course to give parishes and church leaders the understanding, confidence and tools to respond appropriately to people of different abilities. The Disability Forum is currently reviewing and revising the course which it plans to run again later this year.

All are welcome at the service on the 9th, but booking is essential.



# Events across the diocese

**14 February**

## **Leaders of Young Generations**

Hosted by the Diocese of Chester's Mission Team, the day offers a range of training activities, support, networking and strategic planning opportunities for people who work with children and young people in the diocese.

**26 February and 2 May**

## **New Approaches to Reading the Bible**

Part of the Diocese of Chester's CMD programme, Sue Richardson, Christian Aid's Theological Education Adviser, will lead two training days exploring new approaches to reading the Bible. Open to clergy and licensed lay ministers.

**5 March**

## **Creating a Culture of Invitation**

Hosted by the Diocese of Chester's Mission Team, the training day is open to anyone who wants to help their church develop a culture of invitation and to offer a warm welcome to people.

**8 March**

## **International Women's Day**

To mark the occasion, the Diocese of Chester's Committee for Social Responsibility (CSR) is hosting a day to celebrate women from across the diocese and to hear the outcome of the Big #Freeto Conversation.

**9 March**

## **Celebration of Different Abilities**

We are delighted to invite you to a service to celebrate different abilities to be held in Chester Cathedral. The service will include: Speaker Reverend Zoe Heming, Lichfield Enabling Church Adviser.

**19 March**

## **Creating a Culture of Invitation**

Hosted by the Diocese of Chester's Mission Team, the training day is open to anyone who wants to help their church develop a culture of invitation and to offer a warm welcome to people.

**22 March**

## **Beyond the Family Conference**

A day for ideas and networking for all who minister with children and families. This conference will help you connect your Church with children and families in your community through understanding and meeting the needs in your local context.

**22 and repeated on 23 March**

## **Second Chair Leadership**

Part of the Diocese of Chester's CMD programme, Tim Harle, Programme Leader for Christian Approaches to Leadership at Sarum College, will lead two separate days exploring leadership.

**7 April**

## **Leaders of Young Generations**

Hosted by the Diocese of Chester's Mission Team, the day offers a range of training activities, support, networking and strategic planning opportunities for people who work with children and young people in the diocese.

For more information about each of the events listed above, go to **[chester.anglican.org/calendar](https://chester.anglican.org/calendar)** where you will find times, locations, and contact details.