



When I sent out the first edition of NWMA News in February, few of us could have anticipated that by the time I sent out the second edition, all our church buildings would be closed, many of us would be in self-isolation, services would be happening online and we would be reliant on phone, messaging and social media to keep in touch with each other. These are challenging times for us, but I wanted to share some of the good things that happened before we had to start implementing social distancing and self-distancing, and some that have happened since.

Visits around the Mission Area

Oliver and I have now visited all the groups to lead or preach at benefice group services, and were pleased to make a return visit to Upper Thames in early March. I was also able to join Upper Thames for their weekly prayer meeting on one occasion, and to attend a mid-week social gathering for their PCC members, which gave a further opportunity to talk to, and hear from, people at parish level. I was also able to attend Braydon Brook's Morning Prayer on Tuesday morning, once in person and once via teleconference. I have also been able to say Night Prayer (Compline) with fellow LLMs from across the Deanery on Facebook or WhatsApp on a number of evenings.

Marriage Preparation Day

I was pleased to be asked to sit in on the first joint Marriage Preparation Day at the Goss Croft Hall in Seagry on 15 February. The Hall had been beautifully decorated by a team from Woodbridge Group. Couples from Braydon Brook, Draycot, Gauzebrook and Woodbridge all attended, with group facilitation by Woodbridge couples and catering by Draycot volunteers. Steve, Alison and Tonya shared presentations between them. Informal feedback from the participants I spoke to suggested the day had been very helpful to them and that they had enjoyed being part of a larger group of people for this important preparation day.

Lent Eco Focus

All benefices signed up in one way or another to focus on Care for Creation during Lent, with a number using "Saying Yes to Life", the #LiveLent 40 day challenge or the six-week Eco challenge, alone or in combination. Draycot Benefice were trailblazers in this, with Mark Siddall preparing the Diocesan notes to accompany studies on the book, and Katherine Bloomer developing the six week eco-challenge from Iona materials. We had planned to follow this with a practical activity – a local litter pick on the Saturday after Easter. I was able to circulate some best-practice information for anyone planning to take this on.

Youth and Children's Activities

Thank you for your prayers for Malmesbury Abbey Skate. It was another great week. You can see the official video here <https://youtu.be/1oI3yWrpWo8>. Now that schools and youth work are suspended, Andrew Beebee, Children and Youth Minister at the Abbey, is recording a weekly thought and activities for younger people. These can be found on the Abbey website and also on the NWMA website at https://nwma.org.uk/?page_id=153. The NWMA website also has some Messy Church activities filmed last Sunday by Anne-Marie Tuck of Woodbridge Group, which families can do at home. You can find them here https://nwma.org.uk/?page_id=163

Sharing these resources is just one of the ways we are using the NWMA website <https://nwma.org.uk>. We are also posting some of the online services that are being generated by different groups.

Another is the Community of St Aldhelm (CoStA) page. CoStA has been underway at the Abbey for around 4 years now, and I would like to extend a warm welcome to anyone from the Mission Area to join us. You can find more about us at https://nwma.org.uk/?page_id=172.

So please visit and look at what's there, and if you have items you would like to share on the website, please let me know.

And finally, ahead of the COVID-19 outbreak, I asked Katherine Bloomer, my lay minister colleague from Draycot benefice, to share some personal reflections on the Mission Area. Katherine writes:

What does it mean to be part of the North Wiltshire Mission Area (NWMA)? When you are involved in something for a long time, it's easy to forget that not everyone else knows what is going on! NWMA, MAST, DYNAMO – may seem like just a list of abbreviations – but what do they really mean in our local parishes?

Have you heard about THRIVE? Over 2 years ago money was invested in training for churches across the NW deanery, provided by CPAS. Representatives came from many of our 31 churches to explore ways of working better together. It was a welcome opportunity to get to know others across the deanery, to encourage and support each other, however, in Draycot we also learned how to work better as a team and as a group of 5 churches. How did your churches benefit from THRIVE?

The result across the deanery has been stronger working relationships, sharing resources and ideas, and beginning to grasp God's vision together. Here in Draycot it was a real encouragement to have Oliver and Catherine visit one of our United Benefice services in January. It is easy to keep our heads down in small rural churches and become overwhelmed, so it was heartening to be reminded to look up, remember we are part of something larger, and allow the Holy Spirit to work with us.

The Mission Area Steering Team (MAST) meets regularly to oversee and plan ways that we can serve better together. Sharing good news stories gives inspiration and encouragement, infusing the team with energy and possibility. And it was important to remind ourselves it is not about what we want to get out of NWMA, but what we have to offer! Offerings so far: the Ride and Stride prayer; Prayer & praise together; Quiet Days; a joint wedding preparation day and the Lent 6 week challenge.

DYNAMO (Deanery Youth Mission Opportunities – OK, it doesn't quite fit!) – this group of youth and children's workers across the deanery have been meeting since last September, and already relationships are growing and communication improving. By sharing, planning and supporting one another we have been able to offer a film night, a trip to see The Movement, and advertising Abbey Skate more widely. We have shared ideas on how we support baptism families, and how we can work together with confirmation candidates. And we are looking forward to a family friendly prayer walk for Thy Kingdom Come and a prayer space.

All our churches and incumbents are still exploring what it means to be a mission area – as a rural group of churches and across a wide deanery. It's good to realise that it's not just a learning process for us, but also for the diocese and the wider church. It is easy to feel the pressure to deliver on the trust and the finances invested – but the upside of expectation is a growing confidence and excitement to see what God has in store as He grows his kingdom in North Wiltshire.

Finally, let's keep praying for each other – the NWMA Cycle of Prayer for April will go up on the website shortly.

Every blessing,

Catherine

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