**Bath & Wells Peacebuilding Network**

This is a new network being developed to support parishes across the Diocese of Bath and Wells.

**Purpose of Network:**

The Network aims to offer trained volunteers to assist parishes who find themselves having to confront uncomfortable differences or disagreement which threaten the harmony of the congregation or community.

**Background**

The church is in a state of transition in which our capacity to deal positively with difference will be highly significant. The virus has forced us to suspend many traditional patterns of parish life and find new ways of “being church”. Even if some return to normality is possible later in the year, things will never be quite the same. At the same time other external pressures will require us to think differently about the future - the ageing demographics of church membership, changes to clergy deployment and parish structures, new patterns of church activity and worship. Equally, the fact that people will hold different views about how these things should be addressed has the potential to be a source of tension. And the church is, of course, not immune from the wider social currents of intolerance and polarisation that have emerged in public discourse.

For the last three years The Diocese of Bath and Wells has offered a modest support service to parishes who find themselves in difficulties as a result of tensions arising from differences. Often, though, people call for help only after relationships have deteriorated or when disagreements have escalated into conflict.

In order expand the support we can offer, and make it available sooner, we are establishing a new team of skilled volunteers to work with parishes to embrace differences more successfully. Initially we seek to identity and train six people to form a small network to develop a coherent approach, learning from and supporting each other.

**Training and Discernment**

We believe there are individuals throughout the diocese who have who the gifts for this work. In order to seek suitable people and enable them to discern whether they are called to be part of the network we are offering an initial study programme consisting of four free online sessions. This will involve online group study of John Paul Lederach’s book *Reconcile:* *Conflict transformation for ordinary Christians* (2014. Herald Press). The programme will centre on biblical ideas on responding to conflict and explore appreciative, invitational and dialogic approaches to working constructively with difference. The programme will conclude with a half-day seminar to explore how the network with operate in the diocese. Afterwards anyone who wishes to put themselves forward will be invited to a discernment conversation to explore how their gifts might best be used.

**Timetable**

Dates of study programme online sessions 10, 17, 24 May, and 7 June (18:00 - 20:00 online)

Workshop: 19 June (10.00 – 13:00 Flourish House, Wells)

Initial Meeting of network members: July 17 (provisional tbc)

**Accountability:**

The network will operate under the authority of the Archdeacons, with the Diocesan Adviser on Peacebuilding holding responsibility for the development of materials and approaches.

* The Diocesan Adviser will be responsible for finalising any materials produced.
* When operating in parishes or with individuals, the network will be accountable to the relevant archdeacon, with Simon Keyes also kept informed.
* Where a parish or individual makes contact with the network directly, the Diocesan Adviser will liaise with the relevant Archdeacon to agree the network’s involvement.

**The Diocesan Adviser**

The Bishop has invited Simon Keyes, a member of St John the Baptist in Frome and who is Professor of Reconciliation and Peacebuilding at the University of Winchester to lead this initiative.

For further information contact [simon@onion.org..uk](mailto:simon@onion.org..uk) 07968 440684

To book on the course, contact Josie Halla, [ministryformission@bathwells.anglican.org](mailto:ministryformission@bathwells.anglican.org) or 01749 685104

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