LINK

The magazine for the Diocese of Newcastle

AUTUMN 2026

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New beginnings

School leavers' services at Newcastle Cathedral and Hexham Abbey

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Link and Link Extra

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THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND
DIOCESE OF NEWCASTLE

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A message from Bishop Mark


Bishop of Berwick, Mark Wroe

'Coming home'

This summer, the world went football mad as many people celebrated the men's football World Cup. Inevitably many England fans started to hope (and sing) "It's coming home!" In the end, football didn't come home to England, although our players gave it a good shot.

'Coming home' resonates deeply with our biblical faith. Returning to God in Zion is one of the key themes of Isaiah's prophecies: the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing… (Isaiah 35.10). You can imagine this anthem of God's returning people being sung with the passion of a stadium full of football fans.

The idea of 'coming home' is hugely significant. Now that two of my children live away from home, their homecomings are much anticipated. But how much more for people who are returning home after many months or years of being away?

I'm always moved by the stories of long-lost family members being re-connected and finding a new 'home' in renewed or rediscovered relationships. The promise of 'coming home' can be a powerful motivator to find the truth, to seek our origins and our ultimate belonging.

Our sense of home is precious precisely because of how precarious it can be for so many people around our world. The wildfires this summer across Europe and the UK have threatened homes and lives, and have been a stark reminder of the climate crisis all around us.

'Home' is profoundly important to us. Incarnation is a powerful theological truth – that God would make his home with us, even as Jesus calls us to find our home in God: 'Abide in me as I abide in you' (John 15.4 NRSV). Or as another translation puts it: 'Make your home in me just as I do in you' (The Message).

Christian faith is always inviting us to come home like the prodigal. Our worship invites us to gather around the Lord's Table – a foretaste of the heavenly banquet in God's house. Yet I am always challenged by the elder brother in the Parable of the Prodigal in Luke's Gospel, who resents his younger sibling being so effusively welcomed home. As an elder brother myself, I understand where he's coming from. How prepared am I to be generous in welcoming others home?

Football may not be coming home (not yet anyway), but we have found our home in Jesus Christ. Our deep calling then is to learn to share our home in Christ with others as we generously welcome in those whom God is calling. Maybe we can even join in with the singing: "It's coming home!"

Bishop Mark

Congratulations to our newly ordained



Left to right: The Revd Tim Ferguson, the Revd Lydia Padfield, Bishop Helen-Ann, the Revd Katherine Vacher Day and the Revd Benjamin Jarvis



The Diocese of Newcastle welcomed six people into ordained ministry during two joyful services at Newcastle Cathedral.

On Saturday, 27 June, the Bishop of Berwick, Mark Wroe, ordained four new priests:

- Fran Bell, serving St Michael's, Alnwick
- Emily Emmerson-Finch, serving Holy Saviour, Tynemouth
- Phil Keates, serving St Mary Magdalene, Prudhoe
- Andy Morsman, serving the Parish of Alston Moor

On Sunday, 28 June, the Bishop of Newcastle, Helen-Ann Hartley, ordained two new deacons:

- Lydia Padfield, serving St Oswald's, Walkergate, and St Martin's, Byker
- Katherine Vacher Day, serving St Bartholomew's and St Mary Magdalene, Longbenton

We congratulate them all on this important milestone in their ministry and pray for God's blessing as they serve their parishes and communities.

deacons and priests



Left to right: The Revd Yvonne Gardner, the Revd Andy Morsman, the Revd Fran Bell, Bishop Mark, the Revd Phil Keates, the Revd Emily Emmerson-Finch and the Revd Philippa White








Clergy from across the Diocese gather at Hexham Abbey

Clergy gather for diocesan conference

Clergy from across the Diocese gathered at Hexham Abbey for this year's diocesan clergy conference in July, taking time away from the demands of parish ministry to worship, pray, learn and reflect together.

The conference featured inspirational teaching from the Revd Dr Kelly Brown Douglas, Newcastle Cathedral's first Anglican Communion Canon, who led sessions exploring the theme Truth, Freedom and the Path to Reconciliation.

Over the two days, clergy shared in worship, prayer and conversation, providing valuable opportunities to deepen relationships with colleagues, exchange experiences of ministry and support one another, as well as offering theological reflection and learning.

Regular clergy conferences play an important role in the life of the Diocese, enabling those serving in parishes and chaplaincies to strengthen their shared sense of vocation and return to their communities refreshed and equipped for the mission ahead.


Revd Dr Kelly Brown Douglas with Bishop Mark and Bishop Helen-Ann


Clergy shared in worship, prayer and conversation

Andii's joy as faith continues to grow at university

A university chaplain believes it is becoming more normal for students to be faith curious – and it's something they are embracing.

The Revd Andii Bowsher has spent 15 years as Northumbria University's Spiritual Care Co-ordinator and Anglican Chaplain. The university strongly values diversity and has more than 35,000 students from 140 countries across its campuses.

It means Andii and Northumbria's other chaplains, who represent different denominations and faiths, work to support young adults during such a key period in their lives.

As he prepares for retirement in January 2027, Andii has expressed appreciation for the university's inclusive environment, in which students and staff can practice and express their faith at work.

"We want everyone to feel comfortable here," said Andii. "We work to respect religious observances. If students or staff need time and space to pray during the day, or have other religious needs, we find ways to accommodate them.

"Our approach has given people the confidence to explore and express their faith. It has become more normal for people to explore faith while at university and that includes Christianity. It's more socially acceptable for Christians to practice their faith and there's a real confidence around that. It's great to see and be part of."

Originally from Wolverhampton, Andii moved to the University of Reading in Berkshire to study linguistic science. It also provided more opportunities to explore his faith.

"It took me beyond my local church," said Andii. "I participated in the Christian Union and the Anglican society. Learning and praying together – doing things together as Christians consolidated my then new faith."

Andii initially resisted what he later recognised as a call to ordination. But by the time he joined a Christian Root Group community in High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire, his vocation to ordination had gelled.



The Revd Andii Bowsher

His first curacy in Grenoside, Sheffield, was followed by a second at Darfield near Barnsley, a mining community in the aftermath of the 1980s miners' strike, as Andii sought to broaden his horizons and experiences.

He became a vicar in Halifax and Bradford, before moving into university chaplaincy with Bradford University and Bradford College, after a suggestion from people who thought he would be well suited to it.

From 2007 to 2011, Andii embarked on a period of teaching practical theology at St John's College in Nottingham – another role which came about following a recommendation rather than something Andii had sought after himself.

A return to chaplaincy beckoned in 2011, when Andii took the opportunity to join Northumbria.

"It has been a privilege," he said. "As chaplains we support the university staff as well as the students as they deal with a wide range of challenging circumstances. There's bereavement and other big life events, but sometimes the loss of familiarity when you leave home for a different city or country can be overwhelming."

Andii, whose door has always been open for people who wish to explore faith, is no stranger to conducting video calls with people at the university's campuses in London and Amsterdam.

He has thoroughly enjoyed his time in the North East, which has also included some teaching and tutoring with Lindisfarne College of Theology.

As retirement beckons, Andii is giving time to consider what God has in store. He remains active as trustee of a green Christian charity and maintains his long-term interest in linguistic science.





School leavers 2026

Hundreds of pupils from schools across our diocese took part in leavers' services this summer as they prepared to transition to new schools.

No fewer than 500 Year 4 and Year 6 pupils descended on Newcastle Cathedral for leavers' services in June.

And this year, for the first time, the diocese was delighted to offer leavers' services at Hexham Abbey in addition to those at the Cathedral. It saw 150 students join together for worship, interactive prayer stations at the Abbey, as well as a talk from Archdeacon of Lindisfarne, the Venerable Catherine Sourbut Groves.

At the Cathedral, three interactive services were organised by the diocesan Children and Youth team and based on Isaiah 41:10, *'Do not be afraid—I am with you! I am your God—let nothing terrify you! I will make you strong and help you; I will protect you and save you.'*

This theme reminded children to let their faith guide them and their trust in Jesus support them as they encounter new people and experiences at their new schools.

Each day featured a different guest speaker, with the Bishop of Berwick, Mark Wroe; the Archdeacon of Northumberland, the Venerable Rachel



Wood; and Diocesan Children and Youth Team Leader, Tara Russell taking a turn.

During the service, there was time for the children to join in worship together and take part in five reflective and creative prayer space activities, led by young volunteers from Duke's Secondary School in Ashington.

Tara said: "It has been an absolute delight to spend time with so many amazing students from Newcastle Diocese as they reflect on their time at their current school and look forward to beginning a new chapter in September.

"One of the highlights for me has been the volunteers from Duke's, who were absolutely fantastic as they led the prayer activities and answered questions from the Year 6 children. These events have grown every year, so we are looking forward to seeing what 2027 brings."




John, a regular visitor to the café


A warm and welcoming place


Dementia friendly group 'Sing and Socialise'

Friday Café: A place of welcome, companionship and care in Jesmond

A simple but powerful idea, formed in 2008, continues to transform lives in Jesmond nearly two decades on.

It was then that Joan Grenfell and Barbara Peacock, both members of St George's Church first imagined a different kind of community café.

Joan recalls her hope of creating "a place for sharing, whether hot drinks, homemade treats or whatever might be on your mind." As a reader and Anna Chaplain, she had long felt that "being there in the moment for anyone who might need to talk" lay at the heart of her ministry.

At the same time, Barbara's personal circumstances shaped the idea in a practical way. With her husband living with dementia, she recognised the need for a place where those affected - whether individuals, carers or family members - could feel safe and at ease. She wanted somewhere people could "relax without judgement and without having to worry about being on guard."

From this shared vision, Friday Café was born.

Now, 18 years later, the café - held in St George's church hall - remains as warm, welcoming and vibrant as ever. Open to all, it has become known locally as a place that embraces those who may feel excluded elsewhere. Joan, now a trained Dementia



Volunteer Mike serves refreshments at the Friday Café

Champion, explains that everyone who comes through the door is valued and accepted.

Reflecting on its longevity, she said: "The Café is still reaching people and meeting a need in the community we could never have known existed 18 years ago."

John, a regular visitor to the café said: "I'm not a church goer but through the church members who support the café, both financially and in the giving of their time and care, I found new friendships, community spirit and a sense of belonging."

In recent years, this ministry of welcome has grown further. Immediately following Friday Café, the church hall hosts Sing and Socialise, a wellbeing initiative funded by Jesmond Community Forum. The sessions are dementia-friendly, free of charge and open to everyone, offering music, companionship and joy to those who attend.

For Pat, these gatherings have become an essential part of life. She first came along as a dementia carer but even after that chapter ended, she continued to attend. She describes Friday Café and Sing and Socialise as the "highlight of her week," leaving her feeling "totally refreshed."

More recently, following a bereavement, Pat found the café's support invaluable, calling it "a lifeline at a time when I felt like giving up."

Behind the scenes, a dedicated team of church volunteers keeps the café running week by week. Familiar faces like Mike can often be found in the kitchen, serving hot drinks alongside cakes and bakes generously provided by members of the wider community.

Friday Café is sustained entirely through voluntary donations and the generous giving of church members, covering its running costs and ensuring that no one is excluded for financial reasons.

Through this generosity of time, talent and resources, initiatives like Friday Café continue to flourish across the Diocese. They are a reminder of the Diocese's calling to be outward-looking, creating spaces that enable more and different people to live life to the full.

A Launchpad for developing our youth ministry



A training initiative to support clergy and church leaders in their youth ministry has been hailed a huge success.

Church representatives have become the first cohort in Newcastle Diocese to take part in the Launchpad programme, led by the Christian youth work charity Youthscape.

It is a series of training sessions for clergy and church leaders in parishes where there is little or no youth provision in place. The programme has given them the insights, strategies and confidence needed to introduce and further develop youth work in their church communities.

Those who took part received certificates from Bishop Helen-Ann during a celebration at Bishop's House in late July. The event was also an opportunity to share encouraging stories of growth in children and youth ministry across parishes, as well as hearing first hand from young people about their experiences.

Tara Russell, Children and Youth Team Leader said: "It was an absolute joy to celebrate our first cohort of Launchpad at Bishop's House. We shared stories of how new things are growing for young people in our parishes, and of our hopes for the future.

"We were delighted to be joined by adults and young people from the participating parishes, and it was especially brilliant to hear the young people share how they feel the church can engage more meaningfully with them.

"Special mention goes to Holly, who led us in a prayer activity designed to help us reflect on our feelings now, and to remind us as we go back to our parishes that it is the Holy Spirit that blows and moves the sails."

Cowgate (St Peter's) and Newbiggin Hall (St Wilfrid's)

This year's Launchpad training sessions have inspired a memorable summer for children and young people in Cowgate and Newbiggin Hall.

The Revd Ruth Harley was among the first cohort of clergy and church leaders to take part in the programme – and it has left her feeling confident about youth ministry moving forward.



"I found that Launchpad was not prescriptive or one size fits all," said Ruth. "It is rooted in the reality of our very different contexts. It is very relevant to life in an urban estate parish and it made us feel that we already have many great qualities to build upon.

"It helped us to realise that you can start off with something small and encouraged us to try different things. It's amazing what you can achieve when working within your existing resources, with the support of the community."

During the summer, St Peter's and St Wilfrid's worked with other youth organisations to put on a range of activities, including craft activities, games and spaces in which to share time together.

A pop-up living room opened on Monday afternoons at St Peter's, Cowgate, and family 'Come and Craft' sessions took place on Thursday mornings at St Wilfrid's, Newbiggin Hall.

"We've had activities for whole families to get involved in, with ages ranging from two to 94, so it has been extremely inclusive," said Ruth. "Even though Launchpad is about children and young people, it has helped us to think about how we connect with different generations in our communities.

"As a former youth worker myself, I was impressed with Launchpad. It was a really good refresher and it will help us to keep building on the strengths that we already have."

Newcastle Mothers' Union celebrates 150 years of lighting the way

A spirit of celebration and thanksgiving filled Newcastle Cathedral as members of Newcastle Diocese Mothers' Union marked the organisation's 150th anniversary with a special service on Saturday 25 July, followed by a delicious lunch supplied by Café 16 and the Oswin Project.



From left to right: Dean of Newcastle, Lee Batson; Bishop of Newcastle, Helen-Ann Hartley; Lord Lieutenant of Tyne and Wear, Lucy Winskell; and Diocesan MU President Margy Tasker-Brown

More than 200 people gathered for the occasion, including the Lord-Lieutenants of Tyne and Wear and Northumberland and the Bishop of Newcastle, Helen-Ann Hartley. Through prayers, readings, tributes, music and creative art, the service - which was shaped and led by members - celebrated a remarkable history of faith in action while looking ahead to the future with the anniversary theme, Lighting the Way.

Newcastle has a unique place in the story of Mothers' Union. The Diocese's first bishop, Ernest Wilberforce, played an important role in the organisation's early development, helping to establish what has grown into a worldwide Christian movement.

Since its beginnings in 1876, when founder Mary Sumner brought together a small group of women to strengthen family life through Christian faith, Mothers' Union has grown to more than four million members in over 80 countries. Today it remains a women-led, yet inclusive, international movement working with people of all faiths and none to combat poverty, violence and injustice, while supporting families and building stronger communities.



A 'circle prayer' (Christ as a Light)

For generations, members across Newcastle Diocese have lived out that mission through prayer, advocacy and practical care, offering support to those facing hardship and helping to make a difference in communities across the region.

The anniversary celebrations extended beyond the Cathedral service. Throughout the summer, visitors explored Lighting the Way, an exhibition in Newcastle Cathedral, charting the story of Mothers' Union in the Diocese of Newcastle and its lasting local impact. Members also joined national celebrations at St Paul's Cathedral in London and Manchester Cathedral, while a prayer capsule travelled through the dioceses of York Province, including Newcastle, Carlisle and Durham, collecting prayers from members along its journey.



The congregation at the service

Newcastle Diocese Mothers' Union President, Margy Tasker-Brown, said: "When caring, like-minded people get together, the atmosphere is awe inspiring and humbling at the same time. I am so proud of what we can achieve and thank you for making it possible."

The Lord-Lieutenant of Tyne and Wear praised the celebration as "a wonderful service", congratulating members, volunteers and supporters whose commitment has ensured Mothers' Union continues to light the way for generations to come.

Lottery funding for Hexham Abbey to protect medieval treasures

Hexham Abbey has received support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund for its Old Treasures in a New Light project.

The initiative will conserve a unique collection of internationally renowned medieval panel paintings and a rare assembly of grave covers at the Abbey, while interactive technology and an interpretive display will bring their stories to life.

The project aims to deliver a deeper understanding of the Abbey's cultural heritage, enhancing the experience for visitors today and future generations.

Development funding of £138,088 has been awarded by the Heritage Fund to help the Abbey progress its plans to apply for a full National Lottery grant of £994,022 at a later date.

New digital interpretation of the crypt, the panels and other treasures will help safeguard the Abbey's heritage from the impacts of climate change and open up its stories to wider audiences. Sensitive new lighting will illuminate the panels while helping to protect them from degradation, while refurbishment of the Abbey's slype will create a warmer welcome for visitors while significantly improving energy efficiency.

Improved digital signage and a new activity programme will reduce barriers to access, encourage participation by more diverse audiences and make the Abbey more inclusive. The project will also strengthen the Abbey's organisational sustainability through new income-generating roles, skills development and training for staff and volunteers, while an engagement programme will connect local communities with their heritage.

The Rector of Hexham, the Revd Canon David Glover said: "We are thrilled to have received this initial support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Thanks to National Lottery players we can now develop our plans for vital conservation work, community outreach and sharing the Abbey's unique and amazing treasures with new audiences of all ages and backgrounds."



Hexham Abbey clergy, volunteers and staff pictured in front of the Dance of Death and Saxon Bishop Saints panelling

Helen Featherstone, Director, England, North at The National Lottery Heritage Fund, said: "We're delighted to support Hexham Abbey with this initial grant to work towards undertaking urgent conservation of the Abbey's significant collection of medieval panel paintings, while also transforming the visitor experience at the wonderful Grade I listed building. Thanks to National Lottery players, this development phase will help progress plans to safeguard the Abbey's important heritage for future generations."

Conservation volunteer Molly Kady will host a talk about the panels on 7 October. Visit hexhamabbey.org.uk for details of this and other related events.



Conservation volunteer Molly Kady with 'The Annunciation' panel at Hexham Abbey

Gateway to a flood-free future for Edlingham Church

A rural church is looking to the future after essential work was carried out to protect it from flooding.

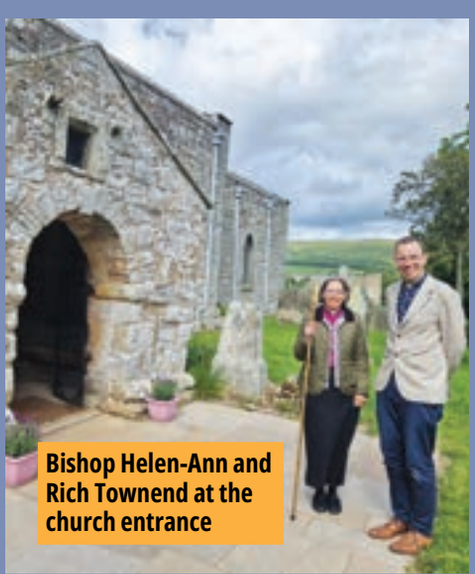
St John the Baptist Church in the hamlet of Edlingham, near Alnwick, suffered three floods during heavy rainfall in 2023 and 2024. With climate change increasing the chances of further flash flooding, an urgent solution was needed for the Grade I listed church.

St John's is located at the bottom of a hill, making it vulnerable to water running down from above. But now, thanks to the Gateway Project, the footpath leading into the church has been elevated and re-routed, diverting water away from the building during a flood. The church gate has also been re-sited.

The essential works, which were carried out this summer, provide an accessible route, ensuring ease of access for wheelchairs and other mobility aids. The project was funded by the Church of England's Disability Project and Northumberland County Council.

A series of celebratory events, including a music festival, took place to celebrate the work, while Bishop Helen-Ann blessed the project during a thanksgiving service, which took place on Sunday, 14 June.

"It has been a long and difficult journey, said Vicar, the Revd Rich Townend. "But we are delighted to have reached this stage.



Bishop Helen-Ann and Rich Townend at the church entrance



Bishop Helen-Ann and the Revd Rich Townend are pictured at the thanksgiving service with supporters of the church

This is a church with a proud history and this preserves it for future generations of people to spend time here and to be in the presence of God. It really highlights the importance and the presence of the local church.

"The thanksgiving service was a significant milestone and we were pleased to welcome Bishop Helen-Ann to bless the vital work that has been done here. It has been quite a transformation and we are very grateful to all who have contributed to making it happen.

"The diocese has been very supportive. Everyone has shared our priority of preserving this sacred space. Lots of different people and agencies came together to have a lasting impact and we are very grateful."

Rich also expressed his thanks to our Church Buildings Support Officer, Tim Lewthwaite, who provided specialist advice and guidance with funding.

Tim said: "Edlingham's church is a very special place, not least because of its historical significance. Thanks to the church volunteers and the Revd Rich, this treasured local church is now being given a viable future. I was pleased to advocate, on behalf of the Diocese, for St John's to receive investment from the church Disability Project's capital fund."

Another significant development at St John's this summer has been the restoration of a south facing window, which had suffered damage during a storm.

It was made possible thanks to a generous benefactor, who initially wanted to make a contribution to the Gateway Project. But with funds already secured, the anonymous donor was pleased to sponsor the window scheme instead.

Following an initial temporary repair, the window has been restored with a new timber frame which houses the original glass substantially.

Eco heating becomes reality at St Paul's



Carol Griffiths, Canon Tony Macpherson, acting churchwarden Beryl Robson and churchwarden Andrew Marjoribanks

A dream scheme to bring eco-friendly heating to a late Georgian church has finally come true after a challenging seven-year journey.

The initiative at St Paul's Church in North Sunderland, near Seahouses, was completed in June, much to the delight of parishioners and church officials.

Originally conceived back in 2019, the project was derailed for two years due to the coronavirus pandemic. But since then, the church has worked closely with the Diocese and other organisations to make it a reality.

Solar panels have now been installed on the roof of St Paul's, enabling the church to generate its own renewable energy, which is stored in a new battery storage system. There is also a heat pump, which provides a cleaner, more efficient way to heat the building.

Fittingly, the work was completed ahead of Canon Tony Macpherson's retirement at the end of June, after seven years as Priest in Charge.

"We are absolutely delighted," said Tony. "I shall be sad not to be here when we turn on the heating in the autumn. Our old oil boiler did sterling work but its age and condition made replacement essential – and looking towards a greener heating solution was absolutely vital.

"It has been wonderful to see the hard work from our Environment Champion Carol Griffiths and churchwardens Ros Slater and Andrew Marjoribanks, with the support of the PCC, come to its final fruition. Thanks also to our local community who supported our application for this to go ahead."

Tony described how the project began in autumn 2019, in a conversation with the then Archdeacon of Lindisfarne Peter Robinson, about the possibility of generating solar energy.

Following the Covid-enforced hiatus, the church was able to make progress working alongside Community Action Northumberland (CAN) and Northumberland Community Energy Limited (NCEL).

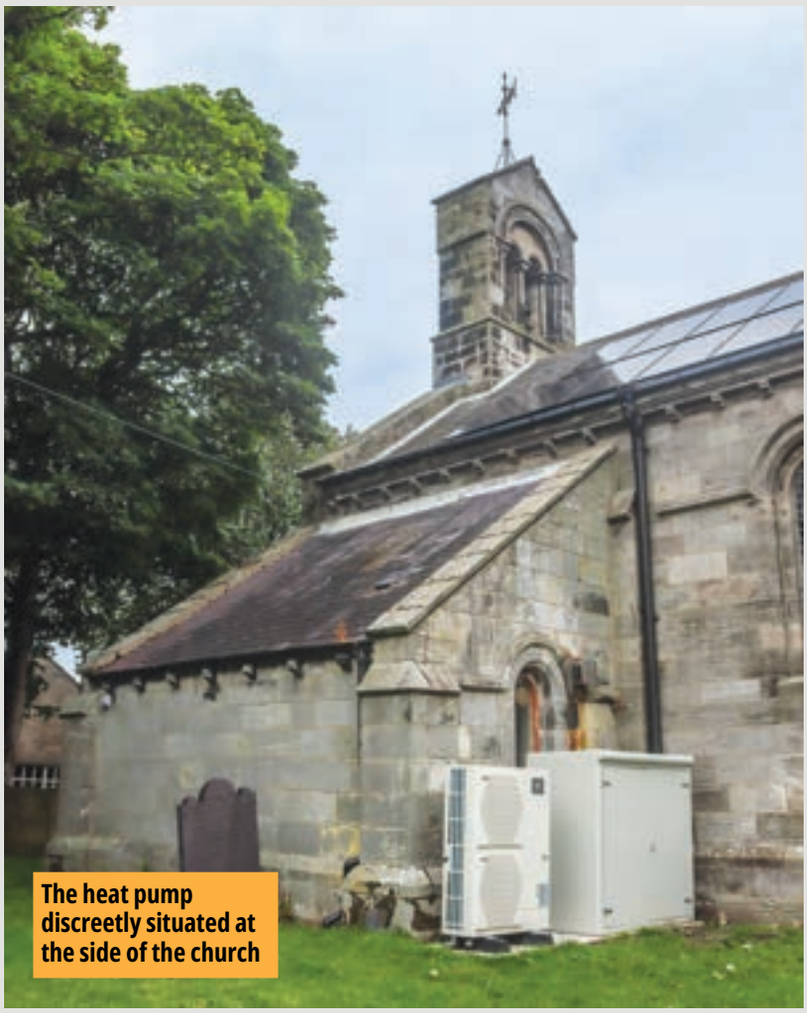
Other key players include Guy Renner Thompson, ward councillor for Northumberland County Council and architect Ninette Edwards, as well as the diocesan Net Zero Team, Church Buildings Support Officer Tim Lewthwaite, and the national

North Sunderland



The bee hives at St Paul's Church





The heat pump discreetly situated at the side of the church

In another eco initiative, the church has installed three beehives in its grounds and produces locally made honey, which it sells. The hives support biodiversity and help pollinate the churchyard's flowers and plants.



Church of England Net Zero Project.

Tony added: "We were able to form a partnership which is a great model for all churches, and source funding for both solar and the heating system. A huge thanks to all involved - their support was invaluable and the solar panels, batteries and heat exchanger were installed in under two weeks."

St Paul's Parish Environment Champion, Carol Griffiths said:

"We've had fantastic support from the diocesan team. Marian Schooler, Net Zero Project Manager, introduced us to the Net Zero Boiler Replacement Fund and, although the application was incredibly complex, we were guided every step of the way by Imogen Pearce from the fund. She couldn't have been more friendly or helpful. We're also grateful to Community Action Northumberland (CAN), which funded the solar panels.

"St Paul's has benefited enormously. CAN owns and maintains the panels, while we lease our roof for the installation with diocesan approval. In return, we'll be able to buy the electricity they generate at a subsidised rate of 15p per unit for the next 20 years. We hope that will almost cover the ongoing costs of running the heat pump. Twenty years at 15p a unit – that really is a dream."

Net Zero Project Manager, Marion Schooler said: "I am delighted to see this scheme completed. It should make a real difference to the church and should help to future proof the building.

"I'm pleased that we were able to offer assistance and help with applying for grants. We are looking forward to working with other churches who may be embarking on a similar journey."

Church initiatives making a real difference – Evelyn's story

During Generosity Week (27 September – 4 October) we are reminded of how acts of generosity can help churches to provide services that can impact the lives of people in our communities.

Evelyn's story shows how church initiatives can make a real difference:

When Evelyn's husband died after 53 years of marriage, her life changed overnight. In the months that followed Evelyn experienced loneliness and grief.

One day a poster on a church noticeboard caught her eye. It was advertising Friendship in Grief (FIG), a group set up by church members Grace and Jacqui, who had experienced grief themselves.

They wanted to create a place where people living with loss could meet others who understood what they were going through. Each week, the group meets at the parish centre, alongside a range of other community ministries run by the parish.

For Evelyn, walking through the door for the first time was daunting.

"It was difficult going into a new place alone but I knew I had to push myself. I'm so glad I did, because Grace and Jacqui made me feel welcome immediately."


Evelyn

Through FIG, Evelyn discovered Friendship Friday, a weekly social wellbeing group run by volunteers at the parish.

With hot drinks, fresh soup and a warm welcome for everyone, Friendship Friday has become an important part of Evelyn's week.

Today, Evelyn's life looks very different from those lonely months following her husband's death.

"If it weren't for the church and all they offer our community, I would still be alone in my grief. I certainly wouldn't have the wonderful social life I now enjoy."
This is what generous giving makes possible.

As we celebrate Generosity Week across the Diocese, Evelyn's story reminds us that giving to the Church is about much more than keeping our buildings open.

Across our churches, clergy, lay leaders and volunteers are working every day to share God's love and serve their communities. Financial generosity helps make that ministry possible – supporting people, buildings, training, safeguarding and the many practical costs involved in being a welcoming and outward-looking Church.

● **If you would like to find out more about donating to the diocese, visit newcastle.anglican.org and click the pink Donate button at the top right of the page.**

● **To read more about Evelyn and other stories of everyday lives being changed through the generosity and dedication of church communities, visit www.newcastle.anglican.org/impact/stories**

Young leaders celebrate course completion with London trip


Young leaders inside the Palace of Westminster

Young people from Duke's Secondary School in Ashington marked the successful completion of their Growing Young Leaders course with a memorable trip to the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey.

Students from Northumberland Church of England Academy School travelled to London in July, following a year of leadership development, personal growth and community engagement. The trip was made possible through fundraising and grant funding, ensuring everyone had the opportunity to take part.

Allison's role in taking church to the margins

The Revd Allison Harding is perhaps best known in Newcastle Diocese for the eight years she spent as Vicar of Newburn and Throckley.

Now, as Pioneer Minister for South East Northumberland, a role she took on with great enthusiasm a year ago, Allison is engaging with local communities, supporting young people and families, and finding new ways to share God's love across the parishes of Ashington, Cresswell and Lynemouth, Seaton Hirst, and Woodhorn with Newbiggin.

Her role is challenging, reaching out to people facing a wide range of circumstances, including those on the margins of society.

"There are people struggling with a number of issues in their lives," said Allison. "They may have issues relating to housing, employment or relationships, be neurodivergent or face other challenges."

Allison prayer walks around Ashington and Newbiggin, is involved in local community groups and carries out school work, including leading collective worship and serving as a governor.

She has also established Food for Thought, a



The Revd Allison Harding has established a new worshipping community in an allotment in Newbiggin

group for people who describe themselves as not religious but want to find out more about God, while enjoying soup and bread together.

"We've looked at Bible verses that they can turn to in difficult moments," Allison explained.

In Newbiggin, she has also established a new worshipping community in an allotment. The relaxed setting provides an opportunity for food, friendship and conversation, alongside Bible reading and prayer.

"It is a place where we can be real and vulnerable with each other," she said.

Allison's previous work as a homelessness and probation officer has given her valuable experience that complements her years as a priest.

"I am there for the people on the margins," she said. "My role is not about getting them into church but journeying with them in their brokenness. If they want to come to church then absolutely - great - but that is not my objective.

"I am going where Jesus would go to spend time with people. The unique selling point is Jesus. I believe in a God that transforms lives and who can set people free. Meeting people and journeying with them and meeting this person called Jesus. That is done in a very gentle way."

Allison also works with Beyond Youth, the Diocese's project supporting children and young people in South East Northumberland.

The role is funded by the Diocese of Oxford as part of its commitment to supporting under-privileged areas in other dioceses.

The Growing Young Leaders course was led by the Diocesan Youth and Children's Team, with support from local clergy and volunteers throughout the year.

A highlight of the trip was meeting Ashington MP Ian Lavery, who welcomed the group to Parliament, gave them a guided tour and answered their questions about politics, representation and public service. The visit gave the young people a unique insight into how Parliament works and the opportunity to share their own views.

One participant said the experience had raised their confidence, despite finding parts of the course challenging, while another described the trip as "an amazing experience that I've worked up to all year." The young people also valued the friendships they had developed and the opportunity to spend time together outside school.

Although the course has now come to an end, the young people are looking ahead to new opportunities, including volunteering with Beyond Youth and continuing to make a positive difference in their communities.



Ian Lavery MP presents a Growing Young Leaders certificate

Tapestry showcases church history for 90th anniversary

A tapestry banner has been made from decades-old kneelers as part of a church's 90th anniversary celebrations.

Holy Cross Church in Fenham has hosted a series of events to commemorate the landmark, which culminated in a parish communion on Holy Cross Day, 13 September, attended by Bishop Mark.

The church has an abundance of about 200 kneelers, many of which date back to the 1960s and were made by talented volunteers at the time.

While some of the kneelers remain in use, church members came up with the idea of re-purposing some of the knee supports, traditionally used during prayer, to form a lasting tribute to the history of Holy Cross.

"It was a good way of establishing which kneelers to keep using and which to use for the tapestry, said PCC member Karen Derham. "It's a way of preserving them and displaying them for future generations to see and appreciate.

"It has been a very creative project and everyone has enjoyed the challenge of working out how to wash the kneelers – and to stop them from shrinking. In the end we hand-washed with detergent before transforming them into the tapestry."



The kneelers relate to local organisations and events from yesteryear, including Brownies, Guides, Sunday School and Sea Sunday. One includes an image of the church itself.

The 3x2 metre tapestry has now been displayed in the church hall, opposite another tapestry banner which dates back to the 1980s.

On Saturday, 12 September, Holy Cross hosted an open day featuring a school choir, a ukulele band and the Salvation Army, with stalls and refreshments. Then on Sunday, 13 September, Bishop Mark was celebrant and preacher at the parish communion for Holy Cross day.



Later the same day, the Revd Gavin Wort, former Vicar of Holy Cross, led a choral evensong which featured the choir of Newcastle Cathedral.

The foundation stone for Holy Cross was laid in September 1935 and the church was consecrated in September 1936.

Over the past 12 months, there have been a wide range of events including hymns and pimms, carols and barrels, a Burn's night supper and dancing, Valentine's afternoon tea featuring a ukulele band from St John's Church, 90 years of dancing with music from the 1930s through the decades, organ recitals and a school assembly.

Church launches £180,000 appeal to overhaul historic Parish Centre

The Church of All Saints in Gosforth has launched a £180,000 fundraising appeal to future-proof its much-loved Parish Centre.

Since opening in 1907, the All Saints Centre has been at the heart of community life. After almost 120 years of continuous use in accommodating numerous church and community groups, the historic building now needs more than just a facelift.

The church is raising funds to transform the well-used landmark into a modern, welcoming and fully inclusive community hub, while preserving its historic character.

The project will include the installation of a new accessible entrance ramp and the creation of an additional ground-floor room. Essential repairs will be carried out to the plasterwork and structural elements to safeguard the Parish Centre building. The outdated kitchen and toilet facilities will also be relocated and completely renovated to better serve the many groups and organisations that use the centre each week.



Above from left: The Revd Andrew Shipton, fundraising committee member Claudia Newbegin, Churchwarden Ann Cross, churchwarden and fundraising team member Dana Corso. Inset left, inside All Saints Centre

As part of the fundraising campaign, a photographic exhibition will celebrate the building's vital role at the heart of the community over the past century, highlighting the countless memories, friendships and community events that have taken place within its walls.

At the church's Harvest Festival service on Sunday, 4 October, members of the many uniformed organisations who use the centre will share reflections on how the hall has borne fruit in their own lives - from developing skills and leadership, to building lifelong friendships and a spirit of service. Everyone is welcome to attend the service.

Looking ahead, the project is expected to go out to tender in November or December, with a completion target of autumn 2027, in time to celebrate the centre's 120th anniversary.

Bronze bell sounds again after 16 years

A historic church bell is ringing for the first time in 16 years after extensive repair and conservation work.

The 500-year-bell at the Church of Our Lady, Seaton, was carefully removed during the summer, but was re-hung in time for a wedding to take place in August.

The single bronze bell, which dates back to about 1490, was repaired, given a newly-cast clapper, a retune and a clean-up. It had previously been out of action since 2010, due to concerns that vibrations could damage the structural integrity of the bell tower and church building.

Parishioners and residents gathered to celebrate the return of the church bell with a blessing by the Revd David Atkinson.

He said: "This was a significant day in the story of our historic church. The return of the bell symbolises the mission of the Church of Our Lady to reach out with a message of hope and peace and bring together parishioners, residents and visitors, as it has done for hundreds of years. We are delighted the voice of this church is restored to ring again to proclaim God's love for all."

Work on the heritage bell has been supported by the Church of England Conservation Grants Programme, with financial support from the Pilgrim Trust.



From left, Friends' committee member Diana Heaney, chair of the friends' committee Eleanor Kermode, the Revd David Atkinson, Our Lady project lead Bob Kermode, and churchwarden Milton Robson

Restoration of the bell and bell tower is part of a wider project to secure the future of the Grade I listed church, which has significant Saxon and Norman heritage. The 'Ringing Through Time' project is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, County Houses Foundation, Northumbria Historic Churches Trust, ChurchCare, Newcastle Diocese and The Friends of the Church of Our Lady.

The project took place over the summer to repair and protect the church building, which has suffered storm damage in recent years. The bell tower has been re-enforced, while the whole building has been re-pointed.

The work has also included new paving to the entrance porch and vestry floors, while the scheme has also enabled development of the churchyard by extending its biodiversity, and encouraged the community to share and record memories linked to the protected heritage site.

The whole project has involved the work of a team of experts including Conservation Architect Michael Atkinson, structural consultants Crawford Higgins, contractors Historic Property Restoration Ltd based in North Shields, Iona Glass of Amble, Beal Architectural Engineering of Birtley, and O&P Bells Ltd.

Further conservation work was required this summer to the ceiling above the altar, after horse hair bonding gave way and loose sections of lime mortar fell, revealing a Norman barrel-vaulted ceiling.

Services are continuing and the church remains open, with fundraising ongoing to support the additional work.



Pilgrims urged to join the final stage of St Aidan's Way

Pilgrims across Newcastle Diocese are gearing up for the final stage of St Aidan's Way, an eight-stage pilgrimage launched as part of our Year of Sharing in 2026.

Following the first three stages, featured in the last edition of Link, pilgrims have continued their journey along the Northumberland coast and through the dio-

Living the Lantern



By Dean of Newcastle, Lee Batson



The Dean and Bishop Helen-Ann joined staff, clergy and volunteers from across the Diocese in welcoming visitors to Newcastle Pride in July

Bishop Helen-Ann joined me (Dean Lee), staff, clergy and volunteers from across the Diocese in welcoming visitors to Newcastle Pride in July.

This summer marked five years since Newcastle Cathedral reopened following the completion of the 'Common Ground in Sacred Space' redevelopment project. In my three years in post, I have heard many comments about how much brighter and more welcoming the building feels, as well as appreciation for its flexibility, which enables us to host an ever-widening range of groups and activities. In the last few months alone, we have hosted *Peter Rabbit: Tales on the Tyne*, raising awareness of the work of St Oswald's Hospice; welcomed a Pride prayer trail created by the LGBTQI+ chaplaincy team; and celebrated 150 years of Mothers' Union.

We also marked five years of Café 16 in the Cathedral refectory – a unique partnership with the Oswin Project that offers opportunities for prison leavers and others involved in the justice system.

Each of these partnerships shares a common motivation: a desire to play a part in the wider mission of the Church by attempting to offer a glimpse of the kingdom of God for which Jesus asked us to pray. If this kingdom looks like anything we can imagine, it is surely a place of radical inclusion, where there is an absence of suffering, exploitation and discrimination.

They were all only possible because of our intentionality about working in partnership with other organisations – both within and outside the church – and we approach autumn excited about the possibilities God will bring us through work with the Recovery community, survivors of Gender Based Violence, and many others.

Cathedrals have sometimes been called 'the flagship stores of the Church of England' because of their heightened visibility, *rather than* because they do things better than parish churches. As this diocese's cathedral, we are deeply grateful to be part of what is happening across our region – churches working in partnership with others to help people catch a glimpse of God's kingdom now.

There is little doubt that more people now engage with this sacred space than five years ago, and the range of activities has enabled them to feel they are standing on common ground, as well as holy ground. We look forward to seeing what God will enable us to do in the next half-decade, as we approach the Diocese's 150th anniversary in 2032, and continue to pray for our most important partners – our fellow churches in this diocese – as they discern the same.

cese, walking from Craster to Warkworth, Warkworth to Cresswell, Cresswell to Ashington and Blyth to Tynemouth.

The final stage takes place on 31 October, when pilgrims will walk from Tynemouth to Newcastle Cathedral. The Dean of Newcastle, Lee Batson, is encouraging everyone who is able to join this final leg of the journey.

He said: "It really has been a joy to visit and explore some of the rural, urban and coastal landscapes in our diocese, which have provided stimulating backdrops for prayer and reflection as we have walked in the spirit of St Aidan.

"Each stage has enabled us to share in prayer as we have walked and listened together. It has been a real highlight of our Year of Sharing, and it would be wonderful to see as many people as possible join us for the final stage."

Using existing footpaths, the pilgrimage has offered opportunities for friendship, fellowship, prayer and reflection while exploring the beauty of our coastal and urban landscapes.



Adopt North East

Keeping brothers and sisters together

Adopt North East is a Regional Adoption Agency, responsible for finding families for children who cannot be raised in their first family.







Adopt North East was formed in 2018 to provide adoption services on behalf of Newcastle, South Tyneside, Northumberland, North Tyneside and Gateshead Councils. Since then, it has found hundreds of forever families for children and approved over 500 adopters.

Children are waiting today for a loving, forever family.

These include children of all ages, needs and backgrounds, and brothers and sisters who want to live together. Adopt North East is currently seeking forever homes for **4 sibling groups of three and 11 sibling groups of two.**

Staying together can help adopted children settle, develop their self-esteem and support their mental health. There are also the immeasurable emotional benefits of feeling more secure and helping each other deal with their past as they grow up.

If a forever family cannot be found quickly for sibling groups together, through no fault of their own the children then experience further loss by being separated from each other.

Please help us to keep siblings together.

Parenting adopted children is uniquely challenging and extremely rewarding. Whilst adoptive parents need all the same qualities as any other parent — commitment, patience, sensitivity, empathy, flexibility, energy and love — they may need to parent differently to meet the particular needs of an adopted child. Adopt North East supports adoptive parents through their journey, from initial enquiry, to thought-provoking training, right through to Post Adoption Support until a child's 21st birthday.

Regardless of whether you live in the North East or not, whether you are working or not, own or rent your home, are single, married or in a partnership, Adopt North East would love to hear from you. We welcome applications regardless of gender identity, sex, disability, race, religion or sexual orientation.

There is a wealth of information available on the Adopt North East website including our film where you can listen to real life adopters speaking about their experience.

Often the best ways to learn more about adopting is to attend one of our regular information events or speak to us directly. Our events are held both online and in person. They are warm, honest presentations about adoption where you can meet some of our friendly team and hear directly from adopters' own experiences. You can also be put in touch with someone who has been through the process to speak to them in complete confidence.

Right now, we are seeking forever homes for:

4 sibling groups of three

11 sibling groups of two

"When me and my husband started on the adoption journey there were so many unknowns. However, for both of us there was one very clearly known requirement; that we wanted to adopt siblings.

As adopters we were on a journey together and wanted to be able to provide that space for siblings to journey together too."

We're here to help you take the next step

Tel: 0191 643 5000 | www.adoptnortheast.org.uk
Email: adoptnortheast@adoptne.org.uk