



Hello all, if you have any news or events that you would like mentioned in the next issue of the newsletter, please let me know by **midday on 31st March**. Thank you!

Reflection from Rev Duncan MacLean

Mission in times of Cultural Change

If someone were to ask you the question posed in Psalm 137:4, 'How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?' the first response might be to state the obvious, that in our lifetime something major has happened in Western culture – the times they are a' changing! - and we find ourselves as Christians almost feeling exilic in nature, aliens and strangers in a world that no longer feels as familiar.

We know that in previous generations, cultural change was often a slow process, with only minor adjustments to social habits and ways of thinking being made. Now, change is neither subtle nor gradual but traumatic and immediate, seemingly unpredictable and random, and for that reason, impossible to plan or control. Somehow I feel that we need a new map for the communities and geography we inhabit.

Maybe our message now must be forwarded to new addresses because those we wish to share it with are often now inhabiting different places. "New forms of church are a "return to sender": a

rediscovery of the original Jesus story for each time, with diverse people in every place" wrote Helmut Theilike.

We need to find out where people now gather, otherwise we will be knocking on the wrong doors. People today seem to be in fear of stepping outside the boxes they create in their minds, and within their own 'castles', and we have to help them to risk, to journey, and to discover life. How?

"Jesus calls us, not to a new religion but to life" wrote Richard Rohr. I feel that those I come into contact with no longer want or need a faith that binds by superstition, rules and regulations. For people seek to live in the freedom of faith – free to be who I am.

We are all on a journey in a foreign land, living on the margins. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? A quote I remember, but sadly not the author, wrote that "The only way to justify the claims of the gospel is by living the way of life to which the gospel calls us".

In living this fresh expression, it is our prayer that in the goodness and grace of God we will be part of the 'enacting a fearful hope for society'. As the people of God we are 'blessed to be a blessing'.

In order to live faithfully in this changing and fragmented world, we have to be willing to explore the new terrain, which now needs a 4x4 flexible, adaptable vehicle. It's no longer a simple, straight road from A to B. In accepting the need to understand and engage with the changing culture we risk misunderstanding, even dare I say it - the charge of heresy - in order to obey the gospel 'imperative' of seeking God as a Person, a subject to be known and loved in relationship, rather than as Doctrine and Dogma, which limits God to our own understanding of 'truth'.

It is this context that makes it important to 'explore new ways of being church' and to keep living the question 'How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?'. In this quest we should also be committed to not being afraid to listen, to ask questions, or to be converted to truth in whatever form and from whomever it may be presented.' It seems to me that the former Archbishop Ramsay spoke words of wisdom when he stated that he "wished to understand and even learn from theological views which were not his own, while at the same time commending a generous and tolerant orthodoxy." We want to retain an evangelical openness – to have strong convictions without turning them into arrogant certainties that polarise and stereotype.

'We can do worse than remember a principle, from the writings of H Butterfield in his book Christianity and History. A principle which gives us a firm rock and leaves the maximum elasticity

for our minds: the principle – "Hold to Christ and for the rest be totally uncommitted."

We could pray these words -

Lord wake us up to what needs doing,

And what needs undoing.

Wake us up to what must be let go,

And what to draw closer.

Wake us up to what enlarges love,

And what diminishes it.

In all parts of our lives,

Disturb us and wake us up.

Amen

Rev Duncan MacLean

Churches/Christians Together Groups and Events

ChurchesTogether in Ross-on-Wye and District

CTRD's World Day of Prayer event takes place on Friday 7th March at 11am at Ross Baptist Church.

This year Ross Baptist Church are hosting the World Day of Prayer with contributions from the other churches in Ross. The service has been prepared by the Christian women in the Cook Islands. They write 'God knows us intimately and we are special to God in our uniqueness. When we open the doors of our hearts to this truth everything in our life changes. We glow from within and we begin treating others as beloved children of God. Through this service we hope people will be spiritually uplifted as

they come to trust the great love of God'.

Based on the words of [Psalm 139](#), and woven within the stories of three Christian women, this worship service invites us to recognise that God created each one of us with great attention and loving care.

Christians Together in Ewyas Harold and District

Taizé Prayer will be taking place again at Dore Abbey on Sunday 30 March at 6.30. For time out, reflection, silence, prayers and chanting in the beautiful candlelit atmosphere of Dore Abbey.

Lent in the Ross Parishes

Ash Wednesday - 5th March
A special service in St Mary's - 7.00pm

Lent Lunches
Eat simply every Wednesday from 12th March

The Creed Deed - our Lent course

Join Professor David Thomas and members of the ministry team to explore the Nicene Creed.
Sundays from 9th March, 3.00pm in Church



Lead Academy



Cheltenham Learning Community

FULFILLING GOD'S POTENTIAL FOR YOUR CHURCH

Why?

Even the most inspiring leadership events can be short-lived and often their impact drains away within a few days, especially if only the senior leader gets to go - not the whole team.

Leading a church is complicated...



As a church leader you carry a burning vision for a church that changes lives and transforms communities. Making that a reality can sometimes feel beyond reach!

We can help!



At Lead Academy, as church leaders ourselves, we share that passion for the local church to bring transformation and hope. Our vision is to equip leaders and enable churches to fulfil their vision so that they can be effective, resilient & fruitful over decades.

How does it work?



You will journey with other churches, helping one another and sharing best practices and experiences. There are four two-day events over two years and you will have access to a wide variety of resources from a dedicated website.

At Lead Academy we invite you and your leadership team on a two year journey with 6-8 other churches. Our two day gatherings feature interactive learning methods that help you work through the challenges of leading a local church together.

There is a strong theme of mutual accountability and we provide an experienced church leader as your coach throughout the Learning Community to help implement what you, as a team, have committed to do.



More questions...?

Get in touch, we would love to help you!

✉ info@leadacademy.net

✉ @leadacademyuk

What does the Learning Community Programme cover?

Session One: Purpose, Vision, Culture

The "why" for your church
Analysing and developing culture
Setting clear goals and priorities
Identifying growth barriers



Session Two: Leadership

Leadership structures
Empowering others
Developing missional leaders
Growing teams



Session Three: Mission

Barriers to mission
Releasing missional imagination
Culture of invitation and welcome
Scattered church mission



Session Four: Discipleship

Creating a culture of discipleship
Identifying learning styles
leaders as disciples
Environments for discipleship



Throughout the two years you will meet with a mentor to review progress and refresh your goals.

A Learning Community near you...
beginning as soon as Summer 2025:

Potential Dates are:

June 2025
November 2025
June 2026
November 2026*

*dates TBC soon

Based at St Paul's Cheltenham
St Paul's Road
GL50 4EZ

Refreshments during the day provided

Typical timings will be 9am to 4.30pm on both days.

Next steps:

- Get in touch and tell us that you are interested!
- Recruit **your team** of five to eight other leaders who will commit to the whole programme, and get permission to share their contact details.
- Make sure that all the **dates** for the four gatherings are in everyone's diary
- Get your church **praying!**

What does it cost?

£1600 per year, per church - ideal number of people to bring: 5-8

Please note - this newsletter strives to share a wide range of ecumenical news

Lead Academy, working with churches for over 15 years, to help them fulfil God's purpose in their local context.



Lead Academy are setting up a new Learning Community that is going to be based in Cheltenham and I would love to opportunity for church within Churches Together in Herefordshire to take part. The Learning Community will be based at St Paul's Church, a church led by Roger and Hannah Widdicombe who, themselves, have been part of a Lead Academy Learning Community in the past and who are keen to enable other churches to have the same experience. (I've attached a flyer with more details.)

We are aware that, for some churches, the cost of investing in training for their leadership team is tricky at the moment. However, some recent generous donations have allowed us to set up a Bursary Fund to help such churches with the cost, so we hope that any church who wanted to be part of a Learning Community would be able to do so.

Do let us know if you'd like to find out more or you think there are church leaders we should be meeting with. Please use the attached to advertise this learning community as you are able. To find out more, please contact Adam@leadacademy.net

Year of Engagement news: Growing Good – A Toolkit for Churches



BROUGHT TO YOU BY **CUF**®

The Growing Good Toolkit is a six-session course about deepening your church's engagement with your community. It is based on three years of research by Church Urban Fund with churches of different sizes, traditions and contexts from every diocese in England.

This **Introduction to the Toolkit** will be hosted by Revd Joe Simons (Diocesan Mission Enabler – Society) and facilitated by Polly Taylor from Church Urban Fund. It will explore the Growing Good material and a number of helpful case studies from very rural parishes, to help you understand how to use the Toolkit in your community.

The Toolkit is flexible and adaptable, providing a framework conversations about what will work for each church and community. The sessions include a mixture of content including videos, activities and discussion that encourages everyone in the group to contribute. The Toolkit helps churches acknowledge and celebrate what they're already doing as well as generating ideas for new activities.

Since the launch of the Toolkit, 2,000 churches have signed up to use it. A recent evaluation has been really positive demonstrating that Growing Good helps churches grow in:

1. knowledge about their local community,
2. confidence in their local mission,
3. hospitality and relationships.

The Toolkit will help you to be more aware of the needs and strengths of your local community and congregation, more confident about sharing your faith through social action and better equipped to build partnerships with other organisations in your community.

To join us at this event you will need to be able to run Zoom on your device. To join the Church Urban Fund Zoom meeting, [please register at our Eventbrite page here](#). The Zoom link will be sent to you in the confirmation email, after you register. We look forward to seeing you there.

Ecumenical Ledbury Easter Service

1. **Good Friday March and Service of Witness : Friday 18th April**
 - Meet at Ledbury Baptist Church for **10:00** a.m. and process down to the Market House where music already playing and joint service for $\frac{1}{2}$ hour.
 - Service sheets provided
 - we will be serving hot cross buns to passers by as our service is taking place (volunteers to take round trays needed).
 - We will need readers from every church family if possible
 - volunteers to open and close in prayer as well as to take part in the minor dramatization.
 - Help with music is always welcome
 - Please email Malcolm Laird if there's any help that you can offer: drmjlaird@hotmail.com

Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat

A church production by arrangement with
The Really Useful Group Limited

Come and Sing! **Come and Play!**
Everyone is invited to perform in a concert performance of

Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat

Lyrics by Tim Rice Music by Andrew Lloyd Webber

Open to all ages, children and adults, to all abilities – the focus is on enjoyment

On Friday 31st October 2025, 7.30pm at The Conquest Theatre, Bromyard

Please email greaterwhitbourneoffice@gmail.com or call 07484 191465 for more information

The performance is open to all people, all denominations and faiths and none - indeed, in taking part, we are ministering.

Roman Catholic/URC Dialogue Group Resource

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC / UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
DIALOGUE GROUP

**NEW
 RESOURCE
 PACK**



The Roman Catholic / United Reformed Church Dialogue Group is completing its 3rd quinquennial with the publication of a practical resource pack for local churches. It includes reflections on the journey the group has been on, reflective materials for local groups and lots of ideas for further things to do together. In the words of one member of the group: “[This journey] has been a joy and a blessing, carried out in the true spirit of receptive ecumenism.” The Mission Team hopes that the pack will enable similar journeys of joy and blessing among local churches. To access the resources, see bit.ly/URCInterDialogue

Calling Christian Grandparents in and around the Midlands area....



We'd love you to join us at our *Grandparenting for Faith* Taster Day.

Anyone who is a grandparent or grandparent-figure is most welcome to join us, to be encouraged, inspired and

empowered to support the faith of the children and young people around them.

Thursday 13th March 2025, 10.30am-3.30pm at Chester Road Baptist Church, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands. Tickets only £10, bring your own lunch or order a baked potato (in advance) from the church café.

This is a partnership between BRF/Parenting for Faith and CYM.

We'd love to include as many grandparents as possible but places are limited to 100, so we advise early booking. Church leaders welcome to come along for free if you're interested in senior's ministry and want to find out about this new course.

At the event, we will be exhibiting some of the elements from our course for grandparents and churches – and we'd love your feedback so that we can adjust it before it is launched in April. You will also have the option to be recorded to share any tips and advice with other Christian grandparents, as part of the course.

[Book your tickets online](#) or email Sarah Holmes (sarah.holmes@cym.ac.uk). Discounts for 10 or more from one church, please email for details.





A WALKTHROUGH OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Saturday 29 March | 10.30 am

Join Dr Alison Gray for an interactive, unique and fun 'walk-through' of the Old Testament story, where the Bible comes to life through dramatized interviews with famous (and not-so-famous) characters.

This is a family friendly event, most suitable for children age 7 and up. Bring the whole family and be part of the story!

FREE event



To book your place, please call the Library Team: 01432 374225 or send them an email library@herefordcathedral.org

To book your tickets or find out more information please visit herefordcathedral.org/events



Dear friends,

Hereford Cathedral is hosting an exciting interactive and family introduction to the Old Testament on **March 29th** between **10.30 and 12.30pm**.

The session will be led by Dr. Alison Gray and involve the Cathedral's Chancellor as they lead an interactive, unique and fun 'walk-through' of the Old Testament story, where the Bible comes to life through dramatized interviews with famous (and not-so-famous) characters.

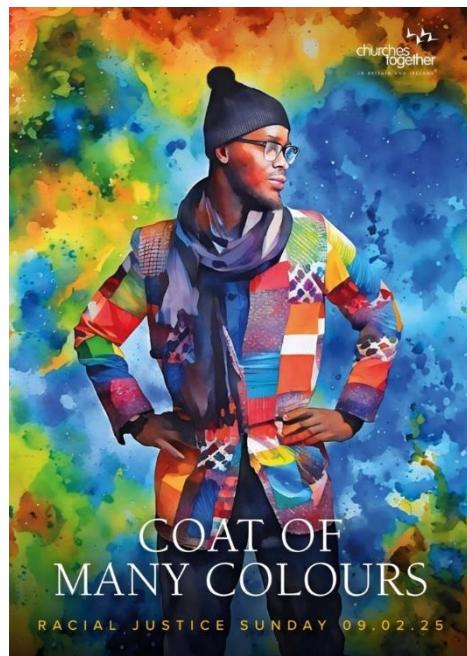
This is a family friendly event, most suitable for children age 7 and up. Bring the whole family and be part of the story!

The event is free and all families will receive a voucher for 50% off in the Cathedral Cafe.

To book your place, please call the Library Team: 01432 374225 or send

them an email library@herefordcathedral.org

Racial Justice Sunday



Racial Justice Sunday took place on 9th February 2025. Our theme this year has the title 'Coat of Many Colours', reflecting the increasing diversity that exists in the churches in Britain and Ireland. Both the Old Testament, or the Hebrew Bible, and the New Testament are replete with references to diversity, in this world and the Kingdom to come. We need to remember that every Sunday is racial justice Sunday! We hope that resources found will move you and help you to continuously reflect on the diversity found within our Churches. Please continue to use these resources for future services! To find out more, please visit: <https://ctbi.org.uk/resources/racial-justice-sunday-9-february-2025/>

Churches Together in England



Churches Together in England launched Coat of Many Colours on 9th February—a special edition Spotify playlist for Racial Justice Sunday, featuring incredible music from Caribbean and African UK artists.

Brought to you by Churches Together in England (CTE), Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) and [SongShare](#), this playlist is a celebration of unity, faith, and the power of music to inspire racial justice.

The SongShare platform empowers Black Christian songwriters by providing a centralised space to register and share their work. Worship leaders and other users can access songs via lyrics, chord sheets, multitracks, and instructional videos. The system's search functionality—by author, theme, or keyword—removes reasons for not discovering or using these resources. Additionally, SongShare will partner with churches to incorporate these songs into worship events and other programmes.

This year's Racial Justice Sunday Special Edition Playlist on Spotify serves as both an

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introduction to SongShare and a call to action. By embracing these songs, churches across Britain and Ireland can reflect the vibrant diversity of their congregations while fostering greater unity through worship.

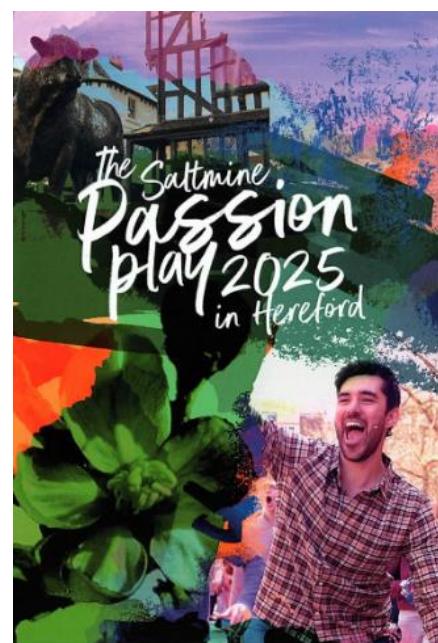
This is more than a playlist—it's a movement. Join us in celebrating the voices shaping a future of justice and hope. [Watch the introductory video.](#)

Sunday, 9th February – Official release of the Coat of Many Colours playlist which you can find here: <https://bit.ly/4htCWVC>

Check out the official press release and poster (jpg and pdf) attached above for circulation across your denomination and networks. [The full story is on the CTE website.](#)

Get ready to listen, share, and be inspired!

Saltmine Passion Play 2025



Passion Play on the streets of Hereford
Saturday 12th April, 2025, 1pm
Starting at the Bull on High Town
 Saltmine Theatre Company would like to present a walkabout Passion Play the Saturday before Holy Week, a contemporary re-telling of

March 2025

Jesus's last days, death and resurrection, live on the streets of Hereford. To make it happen they need participation. If you are interested, [email Anthony Beckett](#) or call him on 07906 344743.

There is a web page also now available for this event too [Passion Play, Hereford - Saltmine](#) This includes a short video from Saltmine about being part of the play. Further information will be added here shortly.

It will be great to see you on **Tuesday 11th March at 7.00 p.m. in St Peter's Church**. A number of the Saltmine team will be with us that evening as we launch this event for Hereford. Other dates for rehearsals are as set out on page 3.

Just to be clear, all volunteers (Community Cast, Stewards, Musicians, Buskers, Engage team and also any newcomers not yet signed up) are most welcome on 11th March and for all the other dates too. I know not everybody may be able to make all of these but the more the merrier thanks, particularly for the Community Cast.

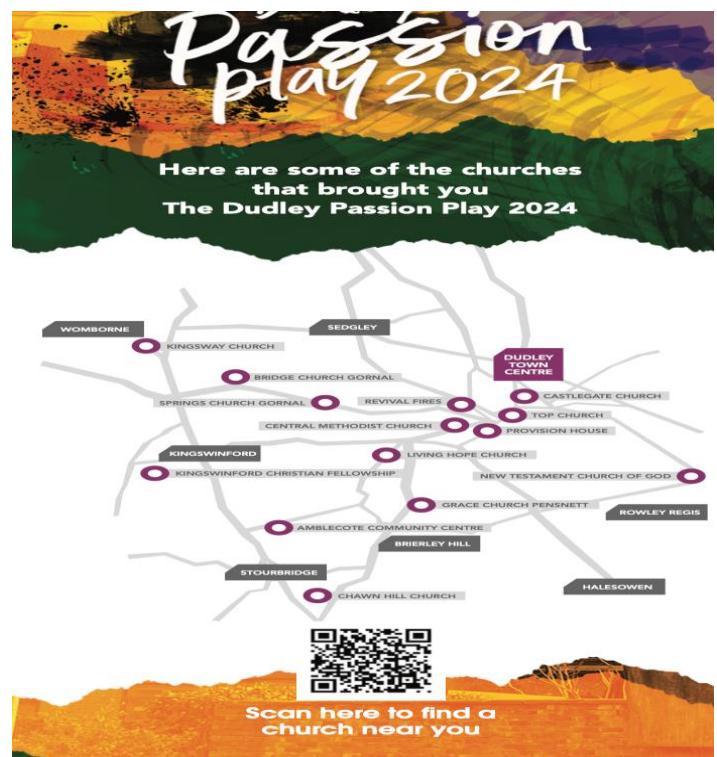
A request for distribution too please - I still need some assistance for

- Any friends or family that want to join us - please bring them along on 11th March. Don't forget we can involve under 18's as long as a parent is with them. We should have some refreshments at rehearsals and a few volunteers to help with this would be so welcome. Any cakes / biscuits for the rehearsal dates would be much appreciated too,
- Could you offer a bed to one of the Saltmine team for the night of Friday 11th April? Literally just somewhere for them to sleep and perhaps a cup of coffee in the morning. They have transport / food etc all set up thanks.

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March 2025

- Donations to help us fund this event could now be made. Please contact Anthony for more information.
- Information from any church about their follow up to this event so we can add to the leaflets the Engage team will be distributing.
- Here is an example of a leaflet that has been produced for previous Engage teams, please let Anthony know what you think about an Engage leaflet format for Hereford.



Lee's Place

The Hereford Homelessness Forum Food Hub is looking for volunteers to help with providing hot food provision for rough sleepers. If you would like to contact Sarah Stevenson to help (as mentioned in the January newsletter) please contact her at sarahlepps@yahoo.co.uk. If you are not subscribed to the newsletter and would like to find out more, please let me know and I can send you more information. Please pass this on to anyone who may find this of interest.

Koble



For Church leaders, PCC members, congregation members and anyone in between, our Youth Hub teams will introduce you to the new resource from [the Ugly Duckling Charity](#) - 'Koble'.

In Norwegian, Koble means “connect” and so we hope that this morning will help us to think more practically about how we might connect with those around us, with each other, and with God in more practical and contextual ways in today's society.

During the morning, there will be a time to hear more about the resource, time to try it out and an opportunity to hear more about how we would love you to be engaging with it over the course of the year both as individuals and as churches.

Refreshments will be served from 9am with a 9:30am start. You can [sign up for the free training](#) or [email your questions to Heather](#).

Hereford Hebrew Reading Group

If you would like a friendly, informal environment in which to read the Old Testament in Hebrew, then the Hereford Hebrew Reading Group may be what you're looking for. All levels of Hebrew are welcome - we have members ranging from those using an interlinear to those with a reasonable degree of fluency. We meet in Hereford or nearby, approximately monthly at a date and time to suit the members. For more information, please contact Rev'd Dr Owen Pembery on 07901356615 or opembery@gmail.com.

Association for Church Editors 2025 Awards



How good is your church magazine?

The search is on for Britain's best church magazine. Entries are now invited for the annual competition run by the Association for Church Editors (ACE), which is an independent, not for profit organisation.

"Judging from the number of brochures and leaflets that land on our doormats and the array of magazines in newsagents, other organisations still value printed material" says Sally Churchus, Chair of the national organisation, "so we are keen to encourage church editors everywhere".

For the coming 2025 competition, which closes on Tuesday 8th April, awards will be made for any size of magazine using just

black and white printing. (Coloured paper is allowed). The Gold Award winner will receive the John King Trophy, a silver baptismal shell to be held for one year, while Silver and Bronze Award winners will receive an inscribed trophy to keep, together with a Certificate of Excellence for display.

A panel of judges assesses each magazine, giving points for various aspects including clarity of the Christian message, cover design, headlines, overall layout and structure, use of graphics and appeal to intended readership. The prize-giving will take place at our annual meeting in September, which is open to everyone and includes talks about how to improve your magazine.

<https://churchmag.uk>

Please use QR code via the camera app on your phone to find out more information:



Photo of ACE Awards Winner 2024 – from left Duncan Matheson (husband) of Editor of HotPott magazine from Cheshire Kath Matheson, Sally Churchus Chair of ACE.



