

ANNA CHAPLAINCY UPDATE

Background to Anna Chaplaincy

You might be thinking, what is Anna Chaplaincy? Anna Chaplaincy is an ecumenical, community-based chaplaincy to older people. It is named after the faithful older woman, Anna, who appears with Simeon in Luke's Gospel. Anna Chaplains can be lay or ordained. They work in care homes, private homes, churches and community settings with people of strong, little or no faith, and are appointed by their local church. There is a rapidly growing network of Anna Chaplains and Anna Friends across the UK.

Anna Chaplaincy is an initiative of the "The Gift of Years" at The Bible Reading Fellowship, launched in 2014. The first Anna Chaplain was former broadcaster Debbie Thrower, who is now Team Leader at The Gift of Years. As a Diocese we are working in partnership with The Gift of Years to establish a network of Anna Chaplains and Anna Friends across the communities we serve. Our primary focus has been on the spiritual care of people affected by dementia.

The Diocese has been funded by Henry Smith Christian Projects to pioneer Anna Chaplaincy in a diocesan context, and this funding was recently extended to cover both Rochester and Canterbury Dioceses, through a paid dementia specialist project officer, Julia Burton-Jones. Anna Chaplains devote at least a day each week to their role and have a strategic focus, raising awareness of needs in ageing and dementia and taking a lead in worship and group activities. Anna Friends spend several hours a week in role, offering one to one support and helping at services and groups.

Anna Chaplains and Anna Friends in Rochester Diocese

We now have a team of 28 – 11 Anna Chaplains and 17 Anna Friends. They cover 25 parishes and Rochester Cathedral; all are volunteers, apart from the Anna Chaplain at Bromley Parish Church who is paid to work 15 hours a week in the parish. Three are ordained and fifteen are established lay ministers, but 10 have stepped into new commissioned roles in their parishes. The team works across four Anna Chaplaincy hubs: Medway; Dartford, Gravesend and Cobham; Bromley; Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells. Through meeting regularly, members of the hubs are able to share experiences, reflect theologically on their ministry with older people and people with dementia, and support one another.

We provide training through a variety of opportunities. The Foundation in Christian Ministry course now has a module on Anna Chaplaincy for 3rd and 4th year students. We invite experts in the field of ageing and dementia to deliver sessions, like the recent workshop with James Woodward (principal of Sarum College) which was held at St Benedict's Centre on 8 February. And we are building links with partner organisations which can help develop Anna Chaplaincy skills, including the hospices and dementia associations in our Diocese. Members of the team also attend national gatherings of The Gift of Years' network so that we can learn from what colleagues are doing further afield.

Parish Initiatives for People with Dementia and Dementia Friendly Church

A growing number of parishes are establishing regular activities aimed at those with dementia and their families. A list of these groups is available on the diocesan website. Several parishes are also keen to lead the way in being recognised as 'working towards being dementia friendly' and the Anna Chaplaincy team will support this process in partnership with local Dementia Action Alliances and Dementia Friendly Community Forums. The Cathedral will be hosting an event for Dementia Action Week this year on 30 May. Entitled "Opening Doors to Dementia", it will be opened by MP Tracey Crouch and include interesting talks, a market place, Dementia Friends sessions, and will close with a dementia friendly service in the Lady Chapel.

Growing the Ministry

Under an agreement between Rochester and Canterbury Dioceses and The Bible Reading Fellowship, we are now developing Anna Chaplaincy in East Kent. The first Anna Chaplain in Canterbury Diocese will be based in Thanet Deanery, and we are forming a new partnership with Heart of Kent Hospice in Aylesford to establish an Anna Chaplaincy team to work alongside their dementia service, hosted by Aylesford Parish.

A key aim for 2018 is to establish Anna Chaplaincy in Bexley. We are holding a workshop about Anna Chaplaincy for HOPE 2018. This will be held at St Augustine's Church, Slade Green from 10.30 am to 2.00 pm on 11 April and anyone can attend. It will be an opportunity to hear from members of the team about their Anna Chaplaincy roles within their parishes. We are also developing plans for Anna Chaplaincy in some of our most rural deaneries – Malling and Shoreham – with the aim of developing new networks of support for people with dementia in isolated communities that lack local services.