New grants to boost mission in our communities by improving our church buildings have been announced by the diocese.

The five-year Church Buildings Grants scheme is backed by a number of restricted funds, which are available exclusively for this purpose.

The scheme will provide £80,000 of grants per year and its aim is to support churches with maintaining and improving their properties as vital centres of worship, community and mission.

Bishop of Leeds, the Rt Revd Nick Baines said: “Our communities’ churches and buildings really matter. These new grants will offer support as we emerge from the pandemic and beyond.”

Cutting the environmental impact of our buildings is also a key goal, as the diocese aims to meet the Church of England’s 2030 carbon net-zero target.

The diocese’s Environment Officer Jemima Parker commented: “Parishes are being proactive in taking climate action such as replacing oil boilers with under-pew electric heating, gas with air sources heat pumps, or installing LED lighting.”

Grants will be up to a maximum of £5,000 per parish (including multi-church parishes which may allocate between churches) and will be valid for 12 months from the date of the grant offer. Full details are on the diocesan website.

Double bronze for green Leeds parish

One of our Leeds area parishes has shown its green credentials by achieving a double bronze.

The church of St Mary Magdalene East Keswick, in the parish of Bardsey, has recently achieved its A Rocha Bronze Eco Church award, joining the other church in the parish, All Hallows Bardsey.

To achieve the award, the church had to hit milestones in a number of areas, including a focus on God’s creation in their worship, making their building more eco-friendly, caring for their church land, engaging with their local community and looking at the lifestyles of congregation members.
The final word

Bishop Nick Baines

It looks like Easter has gone beyond bunnies to elaborately decorated Easter trees in the shops. Which suggests that we need to recall the story as well as restore the retail economy.

We have walked with Jesus and his friends into Jerusalem, the heart of the religious and political establishment, causing great offence to many. We have sat with Jesus while he, shockingly, washes the feet of his betrayer, his denyer, his deserters. And we have heard him tell them that love is at the heart of their future life together – and it is not optional. Then we have followed Jesus through trial and torture, mockery and maiming, to his death on the cross – a cross planted in the rubbish tip of Golgotha, outside the city walls and beyond contamination.

And it is vital that we stay the course through Friday and its terrible loss and confusion. Saturday is empty. A world has fallen apart and disappointed fear is the dominant emotion among Jesus’s friends. Only when we have stayed with the loss and the subsequent emptiness will we understand the grief of the world and be ready for the upset of Easter Day. For Sunday is when a woman hears her name whispered in the garden, the empty tomb begging questions and her encounter in this place echoing the locus of original creation. This time the garden is the place where new creation is glimpsed through the tears, even while the fear continues.

This experience will be familiar to many this Easter, over a year since the first pandemic lockdown and after nearly 130,000 deaths in the UK. Loss and grief, bewilderment at lives broken and hopes dismayed.

Yet, for Christians this is the moment of hope and joy. For we confidently and unashamedly stand in this garden and invite a sceptical world to join us here – to hear our names whispered by the Wounded Healer and to dare to see the pain of the world in a renewed way. The resurrection of Jesus changes everything. It doesn’t exempt us from suffering, but it does insist that suffering does not have the final word.

And that is why the Church is here and is not going away.

+Nick
Bishop of Leeds

Work begins on Halifax Minster following grant

Halifax Minster has been celebrating, as building work on their roof gets underway.

The Minster has managed to secure a £124,000 grant from the government for vital repairs, and now the scaffolding is up, and work has begun, with the aim of completion by June. The Minster’s tower is having its stonework repaired, alongside several stain glass windows being cleaned up and fitted with new guards, to help protect from vandalism. The clock faces will also benefit from a clean-up, work that will be done by abseiling from the top of the tower.

The Revd Canon Hilary Barber, from the Minster, said: “We hope that this work will secure the building for future generations to come, and that God will continue to bless the people of Halifax and Calderdale.”
Don’t be a-llama-ed! It’s only the alpacas keeping the graveyard grass trim

One of our churches in the Leeds area has been playing host to two new four-legged friends to help keep the vegetation under control; they are Pablo and Geoffrey, alpacas. St Wilfrid’s Calverley has a team of grazing animals to help keep the churchyard tidy, made up of three goats, and now, the two alpacas, gifted to the church by a local resident.

The animals have proven to be star attractions for the church, with many across the local area visiting to check them out.

One pupil of Calverley Church of England Primary School, which is adjacent to the churchyard, raised funds to purchase a purpose-built hut for Pablo and Geoffrey to shelter in, during the winter months.

John Corbin, a Licensed Lay Minister at the church, said: “The children love them and it’s wonderful that they will have lasting memories of their childhood that includes being able to engage with these animals.

“A local resident who lives overlooking the pen where the animals are kept overnight has taken on the role of their ‘keeper’ and makes sure they are fed and watered at least twice a day, and has even installed his own wildlife camera to monitor their behaviour.

“This is remarkable as the resident concerned does not attend church but has become actively engaged with this form of outreach into the local community.

“The introduction of the animals has been such a success that the PCC have agreed to purchase a small flock of sheep to supplement the work already being carried out. Our alpacas and goats demonstrate how all of nature points to God and can be a point of spiritual connection for many people, as well as very practical.”

Reflecting on a year of lockdown

As part of the National Day of Reflection, one of our hospital chaplains looked back on the past year. The Revd Ben Rhodes, Head of Chaplaincy at Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, wrote about his experience in the time of Covid-19, and how he has seen first-hand the effects it has had on the NHS and its staff.

“Just over a year ago our hospitals received their first Covid-19 patients.

“The chaplaincy’s delivery of care has changed dramatically; it’s ministry in full PPE and scrubs.

“As ever, we must ‘do no harm’. Everything has to be planned and intentional to stop Covid-19 transmission – such as the order in which we visit non-Covid-19 and Covid-19 patients.”

His full reflection can be found on the diocesan website.
Lay ministry reflections...

Ian Grange, Huddersfield Area Warden of Readers

Twenty years ago, the interior of Battyeford’s Christ the King church was dramatically changed. Church and community had worked for more than a year to create the ‘Rainbow Panel’ - a 25-foot long hanging consisting of 2,000 fabric squares, each incorporating a cross. More than 1,500 people of all ages co-operated to produce a thing of beauty which became a symbol of what we can achieve when we work together. It has enhanced our worship and is a welcome focus of attention in our somewhat austere modern church. For me, it is a striking example of something everyone agrees is a change for the better.

However, we know that change is often resisted: ‘We’ll do it the way we’ve always done it’ is heard too often. But we also know that change is inevitable and necessary. Surely the last year of Covid-19 restrictions has taught us this. So now we in the Church need to acknowledge that all ministry, and the ways we are able to ‘be Church’, have to change.

An important part of this will be how Licensed Lay Ministry is encouraged and reinvigorated in our parishes. On March 27 almost half of our Licensed Lay Ministers/Readers took part in a live three-hour webinar on Zoom. The topic was Re-Envisioning LLM/Reader Ministry. Since then, Area Wardens have received many positive comments about the day. During the next three months, further consultations and discussions will be held across episcopal areas to explore how we can move forward.

‘Clergy and lay together’ was a sentiment much voiced during the webinar. I welcome this as essential for our churches as we continue to preach the Good News in the world of the ‘new normal’. “We are the Easter People and Alleluia is our song”. The restrictions of Easter 2020 are things we don’t want to see again, but it is my sincere hope that from this Easter, through 2021 and beyond, we will see ‘change for the better’ matching our Rainbow Panel at Christ the King, which for 20 years been a symbol of hope and promise.

Wakefield Cathedral welcomes new Canon

Wakefield Cathedral has officially welcomed Revd Canon Peter Farley-Moore as its new Canon Missioner as it prepares to open its doors once again to the diocesan community as lockdown eases.

In an interview on the diocesan website, he describes his past life including his stints working as a Mencap support worker, and as a missionary worker in Hong Kong and South Korea.