# **Templeton-funded Equipping Religious Leaders in an Age of Science project**

# St Mary’s, Honley & St George’s, Brockholes

# Water of Life: our faith and a changing climate

Progress report 22nd August 2017

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## Overview

The project has moved forward with some successful and inspirational events, notably the start-up conference at the University of Huddersfield in March 2017, followed by a number of Parish meetings in Honley and one meeting for a combined Anglican and Methodist and United Reformed church group in Netherton. A special hymn has been written, a sermon series delivered and progress made on understanding and addressing the needs and aspirations of the congregation. Plans have been devised for adopting part of the river for Stewarding, an associated prayer walk and for a productive growing area around St Mary’s church. There has been very effective cooperation with a number of organisations including River Holme Connections, Kirklees River Stewardship and Holmfirth Transition Towns.

There have, unfortunately, been delays to the activities with limited progress being made in engaging with young people due to the merger of the local junior and infant schools between Easter and summer recess 2017, precluding effective activities being held with them. Implementation of the plans for a productive growing area around St Mary’s have also been delayed due to the lengthy repairs to the church tower and builder occupation. Overall the project is some 4-6 months behind the originally planned programme. A revised activity programme has been developed and included in this progress report.

## Original Project aims

We planned to implement a project that would focus on building our hope and trust in God in the world by way of an example in which we considered our role in the opportunities brought from the changing climate and the consequences for the River Holme and its’ tributaries. The River is being used as a vehicle to engage congregations and others in dialogue and actions to deepen understanding about scientific and faith worldviews and promote greater shared understanding and action in order to maintain our vision of hope and joy in God’s love for us.

## Project Activities

### 3.1 Main activities so far

There have been various meetings involving parishioners from St Mary’s and St George’s and a major open conference. The various events are listed in Table 1.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Date/time | Location | Objectives | Audience |
| 17-01-17 7-9pm | St Mary’s church | 1. To review the project and begin to understand what the congregation expect from it. 2. To develop the programme for the start-up conference | Directors and  20 parishioners  plus Minister for Local Methodist and United Reform Congregations |
| 21-02-17 7-9pm | St Mary’s church | To consider “where are we now? What do we believe about science and our faith?” what are our main questions? | 14 |
| 09-03-17 10 am – 4pm | University of Huddersfield | One day conference to initiate the project and set a direction | 42 from a range of faith and non-faith backgrounds |
| 15-5-17 7-9pm | St Mary’s church | 1. To hear about River Holme connections and opportunities to engage in local river supporting activities (Kim Warren) 2. To progress other initiatives already planned. | 12 |
| 27-6-17 7-9pm | St Mary’s church | To continue and review project planning and activities | 6 |
| 11-7-17 7-9pm | St Mary’s church | 1. Presentation on River Stewardship by Jeff Keenlyside (Kirklees MC) 2. Progress initiatives ongoing. | 10 |
| 15-7-17 4-6pm | Netherton Methodist & United reform church | Café style event – to inform parishioners from Netherton and also Anglican congregation from Armitage Bridge about WoL. Including a summary of the sermon series on water and the Bible. | 15 |
| 30-7-17 1-4pm | River Holme north | Walk the river within the parish boundaries looking for stewarding reach and also prayer walk location | 10 |
| 6-8-17 1-4pm | River Holme south | Walk the river within the parish boundaries looking for stewarding reach and also prayer walk location | 8 |

The project Directors have met on a number of occasions. In addition to the above meetings, the following activities/outputs have also been undertaken/produced:

* Online engagement in the *Philosophy, Science and Religion: Science and Philosophy* & *philosophy & Science*, University of Edinburgh courses [Part 1: <https://www.coursera.org/learn/philosophy-science-religion-1/home/welcome>; Part 2: <https://www.coursera.org/learn/philosophy-science-religion-2>].
* Development and delivery of a 4-part water and the Bible sermon series to St Mary’s & St George’s congregation.
* Creation of a hymn – the Water of Life by Revd Debbie Plummer and Jeremy Plummer, referenced to Bible passages.
* Detailed cartographic maps (by a specialist in Congregation) for the River Holme catchment showing catchment extent and Parish Boundaries.

In addition to the specific activities outlined in the following, the project Directors have met informally with many other ministers, congregational members and politicians to highlight the project.

Note on specific events

1. Meetings on 17th January and 21st February 2017

These primarily involved the congregation of St Mary’s and St George’s, although the Revd. Helen Roberts (Honley Methodist and United Reform Church). The aim was to define the project and elicit the aspirations of the congregation. While broadly supportive of the original aims, these meetings demonstrated that many had not really considered their position in regard to science and faith. From the initial meeting, a major question arose: “where am I now in respect to science and faith?”, i.e. people were not clear about how they understood the position personally. Post-it notes were used to raise issues in both the science and faith domains and cross-cutting. From this, two threads were identified – the science thread and the faith thread, linked with cross-cutting themes: the Christian custodial and moral duty; schools – witnessing and our teachers; information imparting – what do we need and who needs to be involved? The outcomes were defined in terms of: the need to understand more about the River Holme, current state and future; addressing the faith questions raised at the meetings, including both practical (i.e. being seen to be prepared as people of faith by and for the community – because of my faith this is important to me) and spiritual (how and in what way is Jesus a part of the earth and not separate from it). Tangible actions were also to develop a prayer walk associated with the river alongside developing the spiritual materials. These meetings set the scene for the conference.

One outcome from these meetings, was that although there was agreement that there was a need to learn together, the original name ‘learning alliance’ was considered confusing. The term ‘learning partnership’ was deemed more acceptable.

1. Day conference on 9th March 2017 at the University of Huddersfield

This was promoted to the communities in the Holme Valley and around Huddersfield churches especially: “Are you or those around you worried about how much the world is changing? All round us we see threats from changes in society and our environment. People of faith should look to the future with hope and joy. We know that God is with us and we need to trust in Him. This conference is intended to support people of faith and the wider community to look to the future with hope through better understanding of nature and what our faith tells us about God’s love for the world and all that is in it. Water of Life is a one year Templeton Foundation funded project that focuses on dialogue and actions to deepen understanding and build hope and trust in God in religious congregations and all people of faith. We will consider humanity’s role in the opportunities brought from the changing climate and the consequences for the people living and working near the River Holme. This free, one-day conference brings together scientific experts with people of faith and experts to set out the background to the challenges, opportunities and appropriate responses to a changing climate with particular focus on the River Holme valley. Speakers from the scientific world, from the River Holme charity, presenting best practice responses to flood risks, are complemented by Christian, Muslim and other faith-based speakers setting out how people of faith should see climate and other changes and their role in responding to the opportunities presented in the context of God’s love.”

Conference Speakers: Professor Michael Clarke, Dean School of Music, Humanities and Media; The Rt Revd Dr Jonathan Gibbs Bishop of Huddersfield; Daniel Johns UK Committee on Climate Change; Kim Warren River 2015; Janet Williams Holmfirth Transition Towns; Mary Dhonau OBE Hon DSc Hon RICS, Chair of The Flood Protection Group Property Care Association, Chief Executive of the Know Your Flood Risk Campaign; Dr Julia Meaton University of Huddersfield; Revd. Helen Roberts, Trinity and United Reformed church; Revd. Keith Griffin Upper Holme Valley Anglican Churches; Jemima Parker Leeds Diocesan Environment Officer; Revd. Liam Beadle St Mary’s Honley & St George’s Brockholes. It was unfortunate that the Muslim speaker, Dr Hazem Gouda, had to pull out just before the event due to his father’s illness in Cairo. There were a wide range of participants, not only from the Honley congregation and local students, but also from other churches (Roman Catholic, Chaplaincies) even from Leeds. The conference set out the theological case (Bishop Gibbs) and the climate and flood risks and responses. Community actions were illustrated by River 2015 and the transition towns movement. Diocesan environmental initiatives were highlighted and in the final sessions a number of religious perspectives presented from personal experience. The conference showed that there was both a need for the project and also a desire for further engagement and development. Attendees were enthused.

1. Meetings 15th May, 27th June, 11th July and 15th July 2017.

These were parish meetings and included speakers delivering information about the initiatives planned. These initiatives which are ongoing are:

* Adoption of a length of River within the parish as responsible stewards
* Alignment and development of a documented and ideally waymarked prayer walk in conjunction with the above
* Cultivation of areas around St Mary’s church and church hall for fruit and vegetables accessible to villagers and as a school science and community project
* Development of faith supporting materials and sermons
* Writing of a water of life hymn

Each of these has been advanced by these parish meetings. However, the cultivation project has not begun due to major repairs to the church tower making access to growing areas and horticulture impractical as builders occupy parts of the spaces. These repairs are now largely complete and St Mary’s growing areas will be started up as soon as the builders are off site. The River Stewardship and prayer walk is now in a position to be finalised and this will be agreed with the Village Trust, with whom plans for waymarkers will need to be approved. The prayer walk materials will be produced and laminated prayers made available to those wishing to use the walk.

A 4-part sermon series has been developed by the Revd Liam Beadle and this is in process of being printed in a good quality booklet for wider circulation especially around the Holme valley. Revd Debbie Plummer (Anglican church, Armitage Bridge) has produced a project hymn for water of life and included Biblical references to the hymn material.

Although engagement with schools is a primary objective, open dialogue with local schools has so far not resulted in any direct activity. The merger of the infant and junior schools in Honley has meant that access has so far not happened. This will be rectified in the coming school year and then other schools in the area will be offered similar activities.

#### Lessons learned

There is an understanding amongst the various people engaged in and with the project that there are issues around science and faith that they have not considered or are not equipped to address. Many people of faith have not really considered what their understanding of the issues is. Although the way forward in the project has so far been twin-track science and faith, there is a need to bring these together in understandable ways to suit different audiences. People mostly understand the need to be continually engaged with understandings of science, especially climate change due to the change in both risks and knowledge, and therefore the need to have an ongoing programme of learning together in a learning partnership. Delivery of the project has been less straightforward than initially expected due to external factors including church renovation and changes in the local schools.

#### Project Outputs

Various materials are available via the parish website [http://hwbparish.org.uk/], however, due to changes in personnel, the website has not been continually maintained and once a new congregational web manager is in place, other materials will be added. The sermon series and the hymn are in process of being printed for wider circulation.

### 3.2 Project Outcomes

These are beginning to emerge, but for the reasons outlined above, the project is not as well advanced as was originally planned. As well as the specific and aimed for outcomes from the project, a number of parishioners have now become involved in aspects of looking after the River Holme, notably invasive species management events.

### 3.3 Budget

There have been some minor variations from the original budget as shown in the Table below. Although the conference costs were broadly as expected, the computer costs were slightly greater due to the need to purchase both software and virus protection. Otherwise budgets are progressing as expected.



### 3.4 Further reflections

The most significant lessons for the team have related to the bringing together of the science and faith aspects of the project. Although progress has been made there is some way to go with this especially for a variety of potential audiences, both faith and secular. The lessons for the churches have related both to the science and how the changing climate may affect the local area in even the relatively near future and the place of faith within this if we are to be a people of hope. Again this is a work in progress.

## Future activities and Revised project programme

Due to the difficulties of accessing the local schools (originally 2 separate schools, now a merged school) and the delays due to the church tower renovations the programme has slipped. A schedule of the forthcoming planned activities is listed in the Table below.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Date/time | Location | Objectives | Target audience |
| 6-9-17 7.30-9pm | St Mary’s Mothers Union | Progress on the WoL project and science and faith ideas | Mothers Union participants |
| Sept 2017 | St Mary’s | Begin horticultural work – congregational meeting with Janet Williams of Holmfirth Transition Towns to advise on creating edible Honley | Congregation and Honley village |
| Sept 2017 | Honley | Finalise stewardship plans and start Prayer Walk | Congregation and other people of faith |
| Late October 2017 6-9pm | St Mary’s church | Evening conference on the future of the River Holme to highlight climate and other changes and potential impacts and responses linked to responsible people of faith | Entire River catchment communities |
| September/October 2017 | Honley school  Brockholes school | Engagement activities with young people | Different levels |
| November 2017 | University of Huddersfield | Inter-faith evening event with chaplaincies | As many faiths as possible |
| December 2017 – Easter 2018 | Other schools in Holme valley | Engagement activities with young people | Different levels |
| 2018 | Church congregations in the Holme Valley | Run evening engagement events | People of faith in the Valley |
| 2018 | Other Holme Valley groups e.g. Probus, etc. | Engage via presentations | Wider faith and non-faith people |

## Phase 2 Scientists in Congregations - A short web-friendly update

Water of Life is focused on the River Holme that runs into the River Colne near Huddersfield. The focus on the river provides many opportunities for people of faith to consider interaction with God’s creation, the world. Recognising that Our Lord is as much a part of the earth as of heaven, it is incumbent on us to ensure that it is looked after. With a changing climate and ever increasing demands for human use, natural water systems are under pressure and in turn can be seen as a threat to human welfare. Shortages of water, flooding and pollution are all potential hazards that we need to be aware of and at the same time plan to manage. Water of Life has taken a twin-track approach to equipping Christians in local congregations with a clearer understanding of the River Holme and how the River may behave in the future and at the same time bringing an understanding of what the Bible tells us about water and life. By bringing these tracks together, starting with a conference at the University of Huddersfield in March 2017, local congregations have begun to see how their place as people of faith within the world is supported by God’s love and that we can be optimistic about the future despite what appear to be threats and challenges ahead. Water of Life has so far explored what the congregations feel and understand about these issues and defined what they need to be stronger in faith and advocates for God’s word in the world. Materials from the various activities are available on the St Mary’s and St George’s website [http://hwbparish.org.uk/], including a sermon series on water and the Bible; a Water of Life hymn and minutes of the various meetings. Prayers and details of a riverside prayer walk will also be available shortly.



Setting off for the first (Northern) River Holme review of where to adopt the river and establish the prayer walk (not all the walkers are in the picture)