Scientists are to take vicars on tours of laboratories and address church services as part of a series of projects launched today and designed to foster better understanding between science and faith.
Church of England vicars in St Albans Diocese, covering Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, will be given the opportunity to tour laboratories with science professionals within their congregations. Scientists in turn will be invited to address Sunday services and other church discussion forums on science and faith.

'Take Your Vicar to the Lab', due to get under way this month, is one of eight to receive funding of up to £10,000 in the first round of the Scientists in Congregations scheme, aimed at helping churchgoers engage confidently with science, raising the profile of Christians whose vocation is science-related, and changing the debate about science and faith in churches and communities.

The projects include a grant to help fund a science festival at Ely Cathedral next year celebrating science, medicine and technology; café-style discussion evenings with students and science professionals based in Baptist churches in Leeds; a family science and faith club at a Church of England parish in Oxfordshire; and a project to develop 100 scientific activities for use at Messy Church sessions for families and children. Messy Church leaders will use science to explore aspects of the Christian faith and demonstrate that faith and science are complementary.

The Cathedral, Isle of Man, has also been awarded a grant to help fund a series of booklets for children and young people to explore the Cathedral gardens from a science and faith perspective.

The new schemes have been announced today as bids were opened for grants to fund a second wave of Scientists in Congregations projects with a deadline for applications of November 11.

Professor Tom McLeish, Professor of Physics at Durham University and co-director of the Equipping Christian Leadership in an Age of Science programme, said: "We are very excited about the launch of Scientists in Congregations in England - the huge variety and imagination shown by the applications received made choosing the first round of projects extremely difficult.

"All clearly demonstrate a vision of science that can be celebrated, explored and supported within the church and a commitment to public engagement. Helping our communities take delight in understanding the world around them by engaging with scientists is part of the church's mission."

Rev Dr Kathryn Pritchard, Scientists in Congregations project leader, said: "We are delighted with the calibre and variety of bids for this first phase of Scientists in Congregations. There is clearly an eagerness to help congregations of all shapes and sizes engage more confidently and joyously with science, with the insights that emerge from cutting edge scientific research, and with scientists and their work.

"Equally, there is a hunger in churches to be able to host and support informed, constructive conversations about the big faith-science related questions. These projects are each contributing, in small increments, to a shift in the mood of the faith-science conversation in this country. We look forward to continuing and supporting this trend and welcome further project proposals this autumn."

Canon Vicky Johnson, a Canon at Ely Cathedral and a former research scientist, said: "Ely Cathedral, itself a marvel of medieval engineering, was built by people wanting to explore the big questions of life and seeking answers about existence and our world."
“The Science Festival will help us in our mission to make Ely Cathedral a cathedral for science in the 21st Century through art, music, lectures, exhibitions and experiments, worship, prayer and events for children and families.

“We hope the festival will help us connect with people in new ways and inspire the scientists of the future.”

The projects are:

1. 'Take your vicar to the lab' - St Albans Diocese

Scientists will be invited to address CoE services and to take clergy on tours of laboratories.

2. From Dinosaurs to DNA - Ely Cathedral science festival

An ambitious science festival celebrating science, medicine and technology to be hosted by the Cathedral.

3. Church Scientific, Leeds

Café evenings open to all in Baptist churches in Leeds, where science students and professionals from congregations across the city will give talks leading into discussion sessions

4. Confident Christian Engagement with Science - St John’s, Lindow, Wilmslow, Cheshire

The church is situated at the junction of the Manchester Science corridor and the Cheshire Science Corridor with members employed in areas including universities, teaching hospitals and the nearby Jodrell Bank Observatory. The project will include ‘meet the scientists’ sessions, teaching presentations, a day conference, site visits to local laboratories and an essay writing competition.

4. Crossing the Gap - benefice of St Matthew’s, Harwell and All Saints’, Chilton, Oxfordshire

The benefice of Harwell and Chilton includes the Harwell Campus, housing the Rutherford Appleton Laboratories, the Science and Technologies Facilities Council and the UK and European Space Agencies along with nearly 200 science oriented companies. The project aims to promote confidence in the compatibility of Christian faith and scientific endeavour through a family science club undertaking science activities and through a science discussion forum for adults.

5. Grace Church, Truro, (part of the New Frontiers Network)

Exploring the big questions concerning science and faith through live interviews and high quality videos of church members who work in the sciences.

6. Messy Church Science, Bible Reading Fellowship

Messy churches give families and others the chance to worship together in a creative and participatory way. The grant will be used to develop materials to help Messy Church leaders to explore aspects of the Christian faith, demonstrating that faith and science are complementary and helping adults and children to appreciate the wonder of creation that science reveals and encounter God in fresh ways. A book with accompanying videos will be made to promote the work.
8 Cathedral, Isle of Man

Project will use church discussion groups led by scientists to produce a series of booklets for young people offering a tour of the cathedral gardens from a variety of science and faith perspectives.

Notes to editors:

The Scientists in Congregations programme is open to all mainstream Christian churches and is part of **Equipping Christian Leadership in an Age of Science**, a three-year Durham University project run in partnership with the Church of England. The project is funded by Templeton World Charity Foundation and was launched last year.

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