

#FollowTheStar is the Church of England's Advent and Christmas campaign. Available by app, email, audio or booklet, there are reflections for each of the 12 days of Christmas based on the journey of the wise men as they follow the star to discover Jesus. Last year over 8 million people followed the star: you can join in too.



...vering this Christmas. Based on the Church of England's
...ices being held in December at the team's five churches.

Producing the cards is a difficult process, but one that the team have mastered with the help of Sue Macdonald, Team Administrator. The cards go through a rigorous editing process in October, around the same time that Sue begins to assemble the list of properties in the area. She uses the 300-page list to identify the number of houses in each street. Then, once the 13,000 cards are printed, she bundles them by street and sticks a label on each.

'People in the congregations are invited to look for a street that they can deliver to,' she explains. 'We've tried to make it more regional, distributing them around the different churches.' And, with around 600 people across the five churches each week, they have plenty of volunteers.

This is the third year they've delivered Christmas cards, and the second year the team have used the #FollowTheStar theme. Barry Hill, Team Rector, is a fan. 'The national church resources are great,' he says. 'There's so much good stuff available, but churches don't always use it. If we're



Pep, a priest in the Team who leads courses for those new to faith and whose number is on the back of the cards, receives a number of phone calls. 'People say, "I want to come to a service. Am I allowed to? How much does it cost? Do I need to book a ticket? What do I wear?" People haven't necessarily had experiences with church. It's important that they know they're welcome.'

And it's this invitation and warm welcome that has led to growth in the five churches.

'About 10-15% of worshippers in our churches have joined over the past year,' says Barry. 'The whole task of the team is trying to look through the lens of people who aren't in church, instead of just those who are.'

James, Team Vicar at St Dionysius in the town centre, agrees. 'It's about being more open and invitational. Like paying. Some people think that you have to pay for services. It's about breaking down barriers.'



The challenge doesn't stop once people are through the doors, though. 'One of the things we find all the time is that people come into the presence of God in church. They feel God but they don't know what it is.'

That's where their post-Christmas courses come in.

'Having something like an Alpha course is helpful. It's a way to invite people back to explore this feeling. We're trying to reach people in lots of different ways in the expectation that one is going to connect with them,' says Pep Hill, who organises and leads the team-wide Alpha course, a



'It's about making ways for God to reach out to people even when we don't know them. It's another way God can work.' The cards, she says, are a helpful way to start relationships, pointing out that some who come along to a service – particularly at Christmas – may have never come into a church before. The process can be intimidating.

'With the card they start to feel like they know us a bit before they come. It gives them somewhere to start. That's absolutely brilliant.'



all of whom have been involved in deliveries.

'It's very fun to go out and do stuff,' says Katy. 'It's about helping the church and community to see what's going on. We prayed at the houses. I remember last year, we delivered it to this house and they came to church. It was quite interesting. The card has all the churches in the snow.'

'And it has our Nativity! I got my hand stuck in the letterbox last year,' adds Martha.

Prayer is an important part of delivery. 'Delivering the cards is a spiritual calling, not an administrative job,' says Barry. 'It's a faith task. If you drop the card through the door, take two seconds to pray for the household. It may not seem like much, but it makes a difference. God always has an address.'

'We're all here because someone has shown, told or invited us. It would be scandalous if we as a church stopped giving others that same opportunity.'



#FollowTheStar and *Digital* are part of the Church of England's *Renewal and Reform programme*, aimed at creating a growing Church for all people and in all places.

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