

Sports and fitness activities are to be championed as part of plans by the Church of England to reach more people with the message of the Christian faith and promote the wellbeing of communities, it is announced today.



Seven dioceses across the country in areas such as Birmingham, Gloucestershire, Kent, Lancashire, Norfolk and Surrey, are to take part in pilot projects to include sport and wellbeing into their mission.

The dioceses hope to help provide a range of different activities from personal fitness classes to holiday football clubs, outdoor pursuits and even sports quizzes. In the Diocese of Gloucester, the Church of England is planning to develop a network of sport and wellbeing centres with participants invited to explore and respond to the Christian faith.

In Lancashire, in the Diocese of Blackburn, sports quizzes are already arranged for churches by the group Christians in Sport and churches have been active in setting up holiday sports schemes and personal fitness classes.

Training for lay and ordained leaders in sports and wellbeing ministry is being provided as part of the programme by Ridley Hall, the Anglican theological college in Cambridge.

The Bishop of Derby, Libby Lane, newly designated lead Bishop for Sport, welcomed the pilot projects.

She said: "Sport is such a valued and valuable part of our lives: shaping our identity, contributing to our economy, offering opportunities for societal and personal development.

"Sports ministry has the potential to transform lives and communities for good through improved health and wellbeing, personal mentoring, leadership development and community cohesion. These projects are good news, sharing the Christian faith in word and action."

The Church of England's Director of Evangelism and Discipleship, Dave Male, said: "The Church of England has always been involved in sport – this is about rediscovering our roots and association with sports and wellbeing. We believe that this work presents the Church of England with an opportunity through its dioceses to reach many millions of people who would not otherwise be in church on a Sunday."

Professor Andrew Parker, Professor of Sports Ministry at Ridley Hall, who is a member of the steering group overseeing the plans, said: "A lot of people have an interest in sport and we expect this work to reach across all age ranges, in all areas of the country and to people of all sporting persuasions and abilities."

"These pilots show that the Church is intentional about making a connection between sport and Christianity and engaging in conversations around gifts, talents, passions and faith."

#### **Notes to editors**

- The work will be carried out in partnership with groups such as Christians in Sport, Sports Chaplaincy UK, Scripture Union and Ambassadors Football. A national project officer will be appointed to help dioceses develop their plans and provide expert help and advice.
- The pilot projects also recognise the important role of sport in our national life and our communities. Sport England in June 2017 reported that nearly 16 million adults in England regularly play sport.

The full list of dioceses taking part is:

Birmingham

Blackburn

Gloucester

Guildford

London (Kensington Area)

Norwich

Rochester

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