

In a new initiative during lockdown, two **HOLY HABITS** groups met online, giving participants from all over the country the opportunity to experience real-time fellowship and learning. The first **HOLY HABITS** online home group met to study *Sharing Resources* in the summer of 2020 and a second group met in the spring of 2021, to study the Holy Habits Lent book: *Holy Habits: Following Jesus*.

Wendy Auld was an enthusiastic member of both groups. She has been a member of **Queensferry Parish Church (Church of Scotland)** for 39 years. She's a member of the mission and discipleship team, with special responsibility for prayer initiatives in the church.



THE STORY begins...

'The current members of the mission and discipleship group are all avid pray-ers, so over the past two or three years they've been supporting me in all the prayer initiatives.

'One evening I said to the group, I've been reading all this stuff about Holy Habits – what do you think about trialling it? So, to get the ball rolling, I trotted around early in lockdown and posted a copy of one of the Holy Habits booklets through all the group members' letter boxes, with a note saying, "Have a read and see what you think."

The group was keen, but the realities of lockdown intervened. Wendy had signed up for a Holy Habits course at Cliff College in March 2020 and that was cancelled. She kept in touch, however, and as soon as she heard about the Holy Habits online home group on Sharing Resources, she signed up. 'I enjoyed that,' she says, 'though I still struggle with getting on and off Facebook! But then Iris [BRF's Digital Marketing Officer] sends us little messages through "chat" and with her help we get there eventually.'

Wendy enjoyed the first group so much that when she saw the Lent group advertised, she knew she would sign up for it herself, but she also reached out to other members of her group:

'I started talking about it in the online meetings of the mission and discipleship group. Along with several other people in the church, this group felt that we needed to develop discipleship more because it's possible for people almost to hide in large churches. So we felt it would be good to offer people something beyond the Alpha course, and looking at Holy Habits was part of our

attempt to explore ways of explaining and sharing discipleship with people who were new to faith and also people who might have been coming to church for a long time, but who hadn't yet "got the bug", helping them to understand that discipleship means taking an active part in the church's mission in the community. It's not just going and sitting in a pew on a Sunday morning. We want to get people involved – we're trying to encourage a more joined-up, seven-days-a-week approach to faith.



Queensferry Parish Church, near Edinburgh

'Initially, we'd been looking at the possibility of working with Holy Habits once lockdown was over, as a whole-church initiative. But when the discipleship group met in January, everyone thought it would be a good idea to join in the Holy Habits Lent group, partly so we could trial the material but also so we could benefit from someone else leading it – i.e. Andrew Roberts! – and that would give us some good pointers for how to use the resources in the future.

'We advertised it and we ended up with a group of 14, five team members and nine members of the congregation. It's interesting that only three of the nine actually lives in Queensferry.'

What struck us from the beginning was how quickly the group gelled – it just amazed us.

Wendy explains how the group worked:

'We opened the Zoom about 7.30 pm and people joined when they could and chatted till 7.45 pm, when we started the meeting with prayer. There was a brief introduction and then we played the video, right through to the end of the questions.

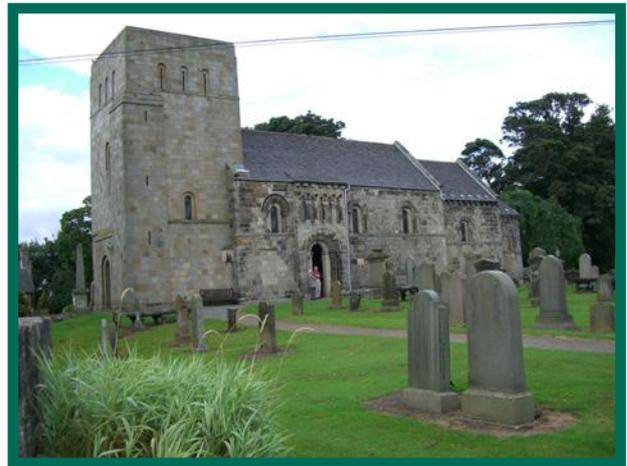
'We originally planned 15 minutes for these, but people had so much to say that the average soon became 30–45 minutes. We quickly discovered that we couldn't get through more than one question in 15 minutes.

'What struck us right from the beginning was how quickly the group gelled – it just amazed us. I don't think I've ever been in a group that gelled so quickly. We don't know why that happened, because we come from quite different areas: some are new to the church, some have been coming for years – and in my own case a lot of years. We're a real mixed bunch, including across the ages too, which range from people in their 30s to those in their 80s.

'What was even more surprising to us – it stopped being surprising because it happened every week – was that when we came back together after the breakout groups and asked if there was anything anyone would like to share with the whole group, we had almost all been led to the same thoughts and feelings. It was amazing.

'Out of the one of the sessions, all the groups came back and said that they'd been discussing what we could do when we came out of lockdown to better serve the wider community. They all felt that the church merrily offers church things but it doesn't really get alongside the community – yes, we've lots of activities, and a lot of people from outside the church come to those activities, but it's things like country dancing and youth groups, it's the activities you'll often find in churches. But people felt that there are lots of lonely people out there in the town and we needed to think about how we could help them.

'We've had some super feedback from the participants. The videos are just the right length, they strike the right note – they're interesting but there are no gimmicks. People like the open questions and the fact that the discussion isn't rushed. They like being in groups of four or five – they find there are not too many people trying to speak so they can all have their say, but there



© Wendy Auld

Dalmeny Church (Church of Scotland), built in 1160, 'link charge' with Queensferry Parish Church

are enough people in the group so there's no pressure to speak. Also, four or five seems the right number for people to feel comfortable sharing deeper feelings and experiences. I've been amazed at how people felt comfortable sharing very personal stuff in the smaller groups. Everybody seems to have found the sessions helpful and encouraging.

'I've been so delighted that other people have appreciated Holy Habits and felt that this was something worth exploring. We've done Bible study groups before, but there's something a bit different about this. Bible study is looking at a passage, breaking it down, trying to work out what it's telling us, whereas with Holy Habits, the questions posed make us think outside the box – they're not the obvious questions about the text but about how we are living out our Christian faith. We found they really challenged us. We had to go deep to answer them.

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'We want to say how grateful we are to Andrew and to BRF for doing this, and making these videos available to us. When we were talking last week somebody commented, "Andrew has quite a way of putting it over – he has genuine enthusiasm, but it's not over the top, and he just has that gift of making you feel connected."' **HH**

We hope you've enjoyed this HOLY HABITS story!

You can buy *Sharing Resources* booklets and *Holy Habits: Following Jesus* from brfonline.org.uk.