

PARTNERSHIP FOR MISSIONAL CHURCH
ST PAUL’S and ST NICHOLAS’, WOKINGHAM:
Report for the Parochial Church Council, September 2016

(Slightly edited for publication on the parish website)

As we embark on the second year of our adventure with Partnership for Missional Church (PMC), it seems useful to review

- what PMC is
- the activities of the first year
- some of the issues, ideas and suggestions which have emerged from these activities but which have not yet been directly addressed
- the PCC Away Day and
- what happens next

✝ **What is PMC?** ✝

The core of PMC is a belief that God longs for his Church to flourish, that He has a plan for the future of our churches, and that our job is to listen more carefully – to Him, to each other and to the wider community – and then to strive to follow the path He is shaping for us towards the coming of His Kingdom. PMC aims to deepen and enrich our faith and spiritual experience and to develop in us a truly missional outlook.

The following short online article is well worth reading – and then reading again – to highlight what is meant by “Missional”:

<http://themissionalnetwork.com/who/your-story/3-questions/>

We are working in partnership with other churches in our archdeaconry and with the delivery team (which consists of clergy and laity from our own Diocese and others, plus Bob Armstrong from Church Innovations in America who preached at St Paul’s and St Nicholas’ in June) to discover more of what God’s plan is for each of our churches and for our parish as a whole.

Additional information on PMC and our activities is, of course, also to be found elsewhere on the parish website.

✝ **Activities of Year 1** ✝

The main focus of the first phase of Partnership for Missional Church has been on **listening** – to one another and to God:

- through Dwelling in the Word – trying to develop the habit of listening to God and each other before settling down to business,
- through standardised interviews of a sample of members of the church,
- through the Timeline events,
- through the collation of many pages of demographic and statistical data relating to the parish (as part of both the Diocese of Oxford and of Wokingham) and
- through the Listening to God Together meetings

Summary documents relating to the middle three aspects are available separately.

From the Listening to God together exercise St Nicholas' drew recognition of the importance of being caring and supportive to each other, and extending this care to a wider community while showing understanding of the needs of our Emmbrook neighbours and communicating what we are good at beyond the church. Alternatively stated, to be more confident about sharing God's love with the community we serve by building on those links we already have, to trust the Holy Spirit and by prayer to create opportunities "To bind up the broken hearted".

The gift recognised by every group at the St Paul's Listening to God together exercise as one to be used and developed is the **church community itself**. Various suggestions as to how to develop this great gift are recorded in the Appendix to this document. Also widely recognised as a gift we can and should use and develop is our "plant" – our church building, the churchyard and the Parish Rooms – with all the possibilities for generosity and outreach that it offers.

In addition, a small number of people from the wider community have now also responded to online questionnaires about their perceptions of St Paul's and St Nicholas's.

Between June and August 2016 12 members of Wokingham's community not routinely in St Paul's congregation participated in the St Paul's survey online. All had lived locally for more than 6 years, most for more than 10 years, and ranged in age from 30 upwards. Half are involved in local community groups; others work locally for business, public services or charities. Most had had very limited interaction with the congregation, and often these were with individual church members rather than with St Paul's as an organisation.

Participants were most often familiar with the church through events in the church buildings (concerts, groups held in Parish Rooms) or via carols in the marketplace, with some stating they were not really aware of anything that the church did in the community. At the same time, the participants were able to name many active community organisations, often WADE, Soulscape, Foodbank, and youth clubs. Their concerns for the local community ranged over amenities (traffic, health, green space, education, security), with concern for neighbourliness or a sense of community mentioned repeatedly. The sense of erosion of "community" was often linked to traffic and ongoing housing developments.

Participants encouraged St Paul's to increase its contact with, and visibility in, the community, while some recognised the church already works with local people in some regards. Some commented that the survey itself had made them more aware that the church was looking to be a willing partner in community activities, and viewed this openness positively. We are grateful to those who gave their time to answer the survey questions.

5 people responded to the St Nicholas questionnaire. Most know about the congregation and how we are involved in the community. Their main concerns are the new estate, opportunities for teenagers and the lack of volunteers. They think we could partner with other organisations in the community by offering youth services and clubs, visiting, more outreach. One would like a face to face meeting with other organisations to explore needs and goals.

✝ Emerging issues, questions and suggestions – a summary ✝

At the end of this report is an Appendix, a long list of ideas, suggestions, worries and questions which were recorded as they arose at different PMC events and during various discussions. These are things we want to keep referring back to and not lose sight of because they must shape our future course.

For example, concerns have been voiced as to our readiness, in terms of our own knowledge, abilities, reticence and (lack of) confidence, to reach out to the wider community; some suggestions are offered as to ways in which these could be addressed. A perceived need for more teaching and training and spirituality seems to recur. Fears that we are failing certain groups (young people and teenagers, say) have been expressed. A lack of depth to the welcome that we think we are good at has been suggested. Better use and sharing of our buildings and other resources with the wider community was mentioned under several headings. And so on ... please read the Appendix with care.

We believe it is important that this record is considered, retained and revisited in the coming months and even years to inform new ventures and ministry.

✝ The Away Day ✝

In July an Away Day was held for council members of the three churches in the parish; a Missional Adaptive Challenge was agreed there for each church. A Missional Adaptive Challenge as laid out by PMC focuses on engaging with a particular set of people in the wider community, to make an identifiable difference. (An active verb is needed to describe it). It gives clear enough direction so that a drift away from the focus of the challenge will be recognised but is open enough that it can be refined in collaboration with new partners. It must reflect a hope to see the Kingdom of God come near and it will be energizing and exciting because the Holy Spirit is behind it. It must be something which changes and challenges us rather than something we should already be doing.

After much discussion the challenge for St Paul's was finalised in these words:

To work (on an ongoing basis) with residents of new estates (in the parish) to realise (i.e. make visible) a community founded on the inclusive love (justice/ peace/ hospitality) of God.

The challenge for St Nicholas was finalised thus:

God is calling us to welcome the people who will live on the new development and enable them to flourish in the community.

It is acceptable and expected that the Missional Innovation Team which will be appointed to "run with" the challenge may need to refine and revise the wording as they begin to engage with it and with partners within and beyond the church community. What they must not do is change the premise of the challenge.

In view of the fact that the St Nicholas's and St Paul's Challenges were, in the end, almost identical in scope, the PMC Steering Group has agreed that one single Missional Innovation Team should be appointed to represent both churches. Their first task will be to reconcile the two Challenge statements into a single coherent whole.

An important element of the challenge facing us is to see our role as Christians differently, to take church out to the new estates, to *be* church in that community, our new place of encounter, and not to see our focus as trying to bring the new residents into St Paul's or St Nicholas to be like us. For the Kingdom of God to come near, church needs to be relevant, something (some people?) to which people can turn, knowing that there they can meet God.

✝ What happens next? ✝

We are currently seeking the best person (church affiliation unimportant) to take on the role of Facilitator for the Missional Innovation Team (MIT) and two other members (people ready to lead us into new things) from each church. The facilitator will be a key appointment.

This Team (MIT) will

- work through an innovation process to develop a new ministry
- form a bridge community with partners outside the church who share a concern for the Missional challenge
- learn to do mission together through a process of experimentation
- develop a Missional action plan to expand the base of people involved in addressing the Missional challenge.

Members of the MIT must commit to a 9-12 month timeframe, attend meetings, undertake assignments and work together as a team to partner with other PMC role players. As many as possible should attend the MIT training at the PMC Cluster meetings on 14 and 15 October 2016.

The MIT needs to be able to count on the PCC and St Nicholas' Council for support, agreement on a process of ongoing communication, discussing expectations and logistical matters.

The facilitator and members of the Missional Innovation Team must be appointed by the PCC. We hope to have recommendations for at least some members of the team ready to present to PCC at the September meeting.

✝ Thanks ✝

Finally, I wish to thank the members of the Steering Group (Teri Austen, Jane Creasy, Liz Gallagher, Lynne Judge, Chris Merchant, Chris Townsend), our Spiritual leader (Fr Richard) and all those who have supported and assisted the work of PMC over the year – Listening Leaders who conducted interviews, members of the parish who participated enthusiastically in the various listening exercises and the families and friends who have endured the paper mountains and many meetings. Partnership for Missional Church is very much a *partnership*, not just with the other churches working alongside ours, but with all of *our* church membership as we strive to live out the Kingdom of God.

As we take those first tentative steps into the new year of experimentation and challenge I trust we can continue to rely on you all for support, both practical and spiritual – please pray regularly for this work. Thank you.

Mary Cassidy

PMC Steering Team

APPENDIX

✠ Full list of Emerging issues, questions and suggestions ✠

1 A. From the External Reading Team's Report on St Paul's Congregational Interviews

- How could we help people to be able to speak more articulately about their experiences of God's presence and activity?
 - > How might we go about encouraging people to recognise God at work within our congregation and community?
- Are there lessons we can learn from services at festivals that could be used in regular Sunday worship to enhance the congregation's experience of worship?
 - > How might we enhance the congregation's sense of participation in worship, e.g. in intercession and bible reading?
- While affirming positive feelings and experiences in worship, are there opportunities to explore how negative feelings might be a profound part of the Christian journey too?
- With regard to the ways people disagree at St Paul's, what opportunities are people given to express their views, either positive or negative?
 - > How might people be encouraged to bring conflict into the open?
 - > How might we address the personal grumblings of some individual members?
 - > How far is there a sense at St Paul's that *Christians have to be 'nice'*?
- Who are the main influencers of change in our church and how well is change managed?
 - > How might we encourage people to express and share their real feelings about change?
- How can the more active "pulling together" of the laity that happens during an interregnum or a crisis be encouraged as a normal pattern so that more people become actively involved in the mission and ministry of the church?
- How might we share with the congregation more of the "good news stories" of action and participation and God at work in our church community and the wider world?
 - > How might we help people to recognise better how much of their life outside formal worship is participation in the life of the church?
- St Paul's is a church-community-focused group of people.
 - > How open and flexible are the groups and activities within St Paul's?
 - > Do they all willingly welcome newcomers?
 - > How might we respond to people who feel excluded from participating?
- There are lots of learning opportunities at St Paul's.
 - > Do we communicate these well enough to members of the congregation?
 - > What about people on the fringe or in the wider community?
 - > How might we make it easier for *any* interested person to engage with the church in this way?
- Are there sufficient opportunities for us to learn from our experiences of God and His activity through reflection?
- Are we doing enough for young people, teenagers and children?
- How often do baptism families become regular members of the church – how "sticky" are they?
 - > What is the formal policy for following-up baptisms at St Paul's?
 - > Who knows the baptism families?
 - > Could they be involved in integrating these families more?
- St Paul's is regarded as being welcoming, inclusive and non-judgemental. How far does our welcome extend?
 - > Do we welcome people outside worship times?
 - > What about the people who walk past?
 - > How could we find out more about how a stranger experiences our welcome?
 - > What is the 'word on the streets' about us?

1B. From the External Reading Team's Report on St Nicholas' Congregational Interviews

- As a community of God's people reflecting the God who is three persons in community, how might we help more people discover and become part of this community?
 - > Would we need to change for this to happen – if so, how?
 - > Do people find it hard to talk about their *own* life with God at St Nicholas? How could we help people to speak more articulately about how they experience God personally?
 - > What opportunities can we find for people to share their individual experiences of worship and the divine – to find the language to talk about God in public?
- Given that we would describe ourselves as a welcoming, friendly and close-knit community, how might newcomers/ visitors sense God's presence and activity at St Nicholas? How might we build on that sense of God's presence and activity to strengthen and grow the church?
 - > What makes St Nicholas so well-balanced, close-knit and welcoming?
 - > What is it that people value in the way of being church that we live out at St Nicholas?
 - > What can we identify in our 'normal' worship as valued simplicity and what is the unnecessary paraphernalia that draws some people away from God? What can we learn from people's response to simplicity in worship?
 - > What is it about worshipping with others that might enable us to encounter the divine more easily? What in our Sunday worship might communicate the profound feelings some people have identified?
- One respondent identified St Nicholas' congregation as responding to God's presence in worship by "living out their faith practically in the week". How might we go about asking where we see God at work within this congregation, especially as expressed "between services of worship"? How would we know when we discovered God at work?
- Long-term members of the church feel nurtured in our life together. Who are the primary nurture-givers and nurture-enablers?
 - > What role do the house groups play and are we clear about their purpose?
 - > How might we encourage this ministry of welcome and pastoral care to be also focused outward towards those who are not yet members of St Nicholas?
- Most conflicts mentioned seem to have been resolved amicably by someone in authority (clergy, Wardens, house group leaders) – is this *always* the best way to handle things?
 - > What is the pattern (perhaps unspoken) for handling conflict within the church? Who are the peace-makers? How might we address the 'extreme' positions taken around some issues?
 - > How widespread have 'fights' been in the church? There is evidence that some people cope by leaving or asking others to leave.
 - > One respondent commented that opportunities to learn from a past conflict have been missed. Can we find ways to learn from experience, especially when there is sharp disagreement?
- How is change managed at St Nicholas?
 - > Who are the main influencers of change?
 - > What have we learned from the experimental changes in seating arrangements? How might this affect the way we propose change in the future?
- People's expectations for the future are largely for little or no change, and their hopes are for growth, commitment and vibrancy. How could we begin to take small steps now that would enable us to 'prepare the ground' for the growth we hope for?
- How might we acknowledge anxieties about the possibility of decline, church closure and lack of change while developing a hopeful sense that God has a preferred and promised future for us?
- How can we identify what has prompted recent growth among young families and encourage more?
 - > Can we identify the key things we have done differently to allow this growth to happen? How could we do more of those things?
- One respondent described St Nicholas as 'different from St Paul's'. What differences can we identify between the churches?
 - > What do we learn from our differences and commonalities?
 - > How can we share our strengths with each other to our mutual enrichment and growth?

- What can we learn from the commitment and lay involvement at St Nicholas?
 - > How might you affirm this commitment and efficiency within the life of the church and in focusing on those who are not yet members?
 - > How might you help individuals and the church as a whole to explore the 'vocation' of Christian in its widest sense? What fruit might this exploration bring for your church
- There is hope that engaging with the local community, especially the 'new estate', will bring "church growth and [make] new Christians".
 - > In what ways might we connect with people moving into the new estate?
 - > What could we learn from meeting these new people – how can we receive their hospitality as well as offer ours?

1C. Recommended questions from the External Reading Team for St Paul's and St Nicholas' to consider *together*:

- One response from a St Nicholas' interviewee described St Nicholas as "different from St Paul's". There was no mention of St Nicholas in the interviews from St Paul's. How far do you have a sense of being united in a common character and purpose as church?
 - > How might you celebrate your commonality *and* your differences and work more effectively together in God's mission and ministry.
 - > How might this PMC journey together strengthen and affirm the ties between you so that you are "better together" and can demonstrate synergy?
- Encouraging signs of growth in numbers of young families have been perceived recently attending both churches. Can you identify the key things you have done differently to allow this growth to happen? How could you do more of those things? What can you learn from the similarities and differences in your ways of encouraging and welcoming growth?

2A. From the St Paul's Timeline event

- Do we do enough to share our spiritual journey with each other and with newcomers and strangers, making them feel truly valued and welcomed in our midst, and enabled to become an active part of our church community? How might we do more?
- Do we know how to love one another, value one another, and disagree in a positive and fruitful way?
- Much reliance and emphasis were placed on our clergy and our church building; what of faith, community and mission?
- Do we focus too much of our attention and care on the building? Do we make best possible use of it and share it widely enough?
- How can we support youth work better, doing more to build up and "retain" the youngsters upon whom we build our hopes?

2B. From St Nicholas' Timeline Event

There seem to be some questions that need our prayerful consideration:

- Spiritual journeys were not mentioned. How can we encourage each other on our spiritual journeys?
- There are many mentions of priests and the loss of a community priest. Why does this matter so much?
- Why do we find managing criticism and change so difficult?

3. From the Data profile

Note: it was difficult to separate out information relating only to St Nicholas's, so only one profile was compiled that relates to both churches.

- Around 11,000 people in the parish area identify themselves as Christians; what might we do to reach out to the many who do not attend any church? (The combined weekly attendance at St Paul's and St Nick's amounts to 0.8% of the Parish population, compared to 2.2% attendance at Anglican worship across the Oxford diocese as a whole).
- Christmas and/or Easter attendance rises to more than 650 – what might we do to retain interest and a sense of belonging throughout the year?
- Do we do enough to welcome, encourage and follow up on families who use the church for weddings, baptisms, funerals?
- The age profile of the parish is fairly even, but our congregations are not so evenly spread. Is there a particular age group which we are failing to attract? Why might that be?
- How much more could we connect with the many groups which use the parish rooms?
- What about the organisations and groups to which church members belong out in the community?
- With what community organisations could the congregation partner in order to involve itself more fully in the life of the community?
- Is the lack of amenities (e.g. toilets, flexibility of seating, lighting, reliable sound system) deterring a wider use of our church building?
- In what ways do our buildings enable mission? In what ways are they a barrier? What do they say to the local community about God?
- How do we build the numbers of members willing to share the work which underpins church life – finance, ministry, mission, worship?

4A. From the St Paul's Community questionnaire (12 respondents)

- to increase contact with, and visibility in, the community
- to become a willing partner in community activities

4B. From the St Nicholas Community questionnaire (5 respondents)

- Suggestion: partner with other organisations in the community by offering youth services and clubs, visiting, more outreach.
- One respondent would like a face to face meeting with other organisations to explore needs and goals.

5A. From the Listening to God Together exercise at St Paul's:

- through training and teaching develop and strengthen the church community, our greatest gift, to share and participate in more activities and to move out beyond the church in faith and in accordance with the teaching of Christ. We have talents, service, knowledge to share; we need ways of doing so more.
 - > building up of small groups, e.g.
 - men's group with teaching on Christian marriage and parenting
 - churchyard working party
 - study groups
 - prayer groups
 - mums and toddlers
 - teens and pre-teens
 - > building up of good spiritual habits, prayer, bible study – personal and corporate
 - > regular quiet days and/or retreats
 - > teaching in evangelism and outreach
 - > teaching in our catholic tradition, its richness and variety, its value
 - > bereavement support training
 - > making best use of people, experts and resources already in the parish
 - > identify weaknesses and attempt to address them
 - > develop greater confidence to speak out about one's faith and church activities
 - > develop greater confidence to volunteer to take on jobs in the parish
 - > getting to know one another and building friendships
- better communication – quantity and substance – both internally and externally
- better use (sharing) of church building (may need better lighting, toilets and facilities first)
 - > concerts
 - > talks
 - > exhibitions
- How can we use our choir and music tradition as an outreach?
- How do we increase commitment to nurturing our children and young people? How do we encourage one another better?

5B From the Listening to God Together exercise at St Nicholas':

- Mission in new housing
- Parent and toddler group
- Group for over 60s
- Special group for men
- Be active
- Be prayerful
- Improve our listening skills
- Develop how we communicate ourselves
- Be ready to make small changes
- Be open to new ideas/ways of doing things

We are called to be:

- Caring and supportive, as we are now, to each other
- Extending this care to a wider community (non-church)
- Communicative of what we are good at, beyond the church
- More confident about sharing God's love with the community we serve by building on those links we already have
- To trust the Holy Spirit and by prayer to create these opportunities
- Understanding of needs of our Emmbrook neighbours
- "To bind up the broken hearted"

6A. From the Away day discussions (St Pauls')

- Disabled people, in a few variants, e.g.
 - > learning disabilities
 - > physical disabilities
 - > mental health issues
- New arrivals, including the new estates, but also
 - > refugees
 - > people who have moved to existing houses in Wokingham
- Particular demographic groups —
 - > families,
 - > 25-40s,
 - > teenagers
 - > minorities – building closer links with eg Hindu, Sikh, Romanian, Polish ... communities
- Isolated / lonely — but Link already exists
 - > suggestion for regular drop-in coffee and chat with knitting or something
 - > homeless
- People seeking peace — rather “fuzzy”
- musicians who use our facilities
- churchyard users and passers through (schoolgirls in particular)
- passersby and hirers of Parish Rooms
- communication

Existing potential people of peace in the community:

- WADE
- JAC
- Link

6B. From the Away day discussions (St Nicholas')

- Young people
- Young families
- Lonely people of all ages
- Needs of the elderly
- Men on their own
- New Housing
- Community – new and old
- Fear
- New people on new estate
- Change
- Uncertainty
- Talking about faith
- Presence – how with no building?