

Minutes of a Supplementary Meeting of Harwell PCC

Held to discuss

Direction and SWOT Analysis

on Monday 15th June 2009 at 7:45 pm in St Matthew's Church, Harwell

Present

Sid Gale	Clive House	Chris Stott (Chair)
Mel Gibson	Tony Hughes	Frances Taylor
Gordon Gill	Martin Speed - minutes	Matt Webb
Georgina Greer	Roz Shipp	Jane Woolley

Purpose of the meeting

The chairman's agreed the following form of words prior to the meeting as a statement of purpose: *we are dependent upon God to grow His church. We can help this process or hinder it by what we do, how we do it, and what we are. In the light of this we hold this meeting to investigate manageable objectives for the coming year in the context of previous progress and SWOT analysis.*

1. Opening and prayer

Chris opened the meeting with a reflection on how God's use of divergent talents and disparate approaches is demonstrated in the growth of the early church as described in Acts. He then led the meeting in prayer.

2. Opportunity for questions and clarification on the past endeavours

The following are the key questions and the responses. (The italic text aims to summarise the key questions raised by the discussion and the text that follows it aims express the broad direction of the detailed answers given)

How does the 'renewal proposal' fit in with the 'because approach'? They were separate initiatives. A working party considered 'the because approach' two years ago. This year Chris put forward a paper proposing a 'renewal project' (which originally had a focus on the fabric of the Church but became more of a holistic approach that had parallels with the 'because approach' considerations but was not specifically linked)

What did the 'because approach' lead to? It provided a framework which gave a useful perspective on opportunities or ways of classifying initiatives – but did not lead to substantial changes in what was done. Harwell was identified in the 'because approach' categorisation as being less good at 'making disciples' (though the discussion gave further perspectives including the observation that it was often not clear who is being 'discipled' and – as noted in the Living Faith initiative – activities for children often discipled their parents.)

What represents the work done by the Church in Harwell? The potential structure diagram shows a very large number of groups associated with the church, but a line to identify what is specifically 'church' work would be very blurred. There no hard and fast rules about how groups are associated with the Church. For example, the 'Oxford friendship group' advertised in the Broadsheet are in no way associated with our church, though it may have church members working for it, Church members were founders of the 'meals for new mums' service but that has no direct link to the church, and Fledgelings is run for all the people of the village with young children, but was started by church members with the blessing of the PCC and uses a church

building. The parish portfolio will go some way towards identifying the remit of the church, but it is designed as a supporting document for Pam Rolls' training and is not comprehensive.

On the issue of vision, Chris clarified: The phrase 'making followers of Jesus' was intended to encompass both:

- Helping people to become followers of Jesus; and
- Helping people who had become followers of Jesus (however long ago) to grow in the knowledge and love of Christ.

3. Re-visiting the 2008 SWOT analysis: are any adjustments needed?

The following points main points were made:

- A strength of the church was the way it can represent Christ's compassion in action – leading to a respect for the Christian community.
- Communication and 'marketing' issues represented a need to talk to people in a language they could understand
- The problem of the church not reaching 'pockets' of the village – particularly the more deprived social groups – is of particular importance.
- New approaches to church, such as 'messy church' or 'café church', may be a way to reach those who had a negative perception of the traditional Anglican parish church. It would be better in principal to 'go there' rather than try to 'bring them here.'
- It was important to identify communications gaps: for example the Ladygrove church was predominantly made up of young people and communicated through 'facebook.'
- It is dangerous to have a 'one size fits all' mentality – however as the 'body of Christ' it was also important to ensure that all should be brought in. (One perspective was that it was undesirable for the church to have separate groups for different types of people, but that it was probably the most appropriate way to progress.)
- We must beware having people say after an Alpha course that they would go to church if it was more like the Alpha course.
- The strong scouting groups in the village should be counted as an opportunity (though it was noted that although they used a church building and are 'a church sponsored group' they were not a church group as such.)
- The lack of flexibility in the Church building was a weakness.
- The threat associated with the Church roof was only that part of it would at some time fairly soon need replacing – not all the roof as implied by the original document.
- 'Practicing what we preach' (even at the mundane level of greeting people in street) was identified as an opportunity (or weakness when not done).
- The re-organization of the Deanery pastoral committee was identified as an opportunity.
- The economic downturn was seen as a threat to income – but also as a potential opportunity to provide help.
- The focus on people looking for moral values (following issues in the news such as MPs' expenses) may provide an opportunity.
- The opportunity arising from the Didcot West development (though there was some debate as to the number of homes expected within the original timescales because of slippage in the project plan which has been made worse by the downturn.)

4. Drawing out issues from the SWOT:

a. Where we think God is leading his church in Harwell?

To further the existing vision – sharing life at the heart of the community and making followers of Jesus - the dominant response to the question of where we go from here was to achieve a better balance in the Christian community – improving degree to which the church reflects the diversity of social backgrounds within the village and the age profile of the residents.

b. How might we help this process or risk hindering it by what we do, how we do it, and what we are?

The main points made in the discussion about what could or should be done were as follows:

There was some discussion of the failings of initiatives such as the ‘because approach’. Despite very admirable qualities (such as the strong biblical basis of the ‘because approach’ in particular) it was noted that they tended to use too many resources and tended to be superseded by a new initiative before reaching fruition – creating an ‘initiative culture’.

It was also noted that it was essential to achieve ownership by the whole church of whatever was put in place.

Improving the quality of our life together

The quality of life together was identified as important – and it was noted that small groups create community well. Small groups were said to give a greater opportunity to bond. The Chilton small group (the one that focussed on the sermon from the preceding Sunday) was an example of a new direction in this area.

The ‘mission curry lunch’ was identified as an example of very good practice – noting that it brought together people of all ages. It was thought that it worked because of (a) the work put in by the missions group (and their ownership) and (b) the fact that it was different – and therefore got noticed. Such events were particularly good because you could bring along people who didn’t normally attend such events – or the services.

Alternative worship opportunities

Alternative worship opportunities were discussed:

- The Jazz worship service and Songs of praise were seen as very successful
- It was noted that the special services were on Sunday – which may not be the best day for everyone

Help us to grow as disciples

The ‘Holy Spirit’ session on the 20th June was identified as another particularly good idea – and one that was helping people to grow as disciples.

The point was made that fresh expressions of ‘community’ were very important to the development of the church in the past (the monks evangelised Europe). It was suggested that more could be done to ‘cross cut’ the things we do into small groups: taking what is good and transferring it among small groups.

Connecting to ‘untouched’

Ways to address the number of people we are not reaching were discussed:

- It was asserted that is *all about people* – creating interactions
- It was suggested that the Ethos of the Church needs to change: to ‘think outwards’
- It was also said that ‘traditional’ events such as barbeques or a Fete are good at bringing people in. The ‘fairtrade’ coffee morning was successful in attracting many non-church people.

- It was pointed out that members of the church are already a strong presence among local groups – not as church representatives, but known as Christians none-the-less.
- It was thought likely that many people in the village do not realise all of the things the church is already putting on.
- It was acknowledged that there was increasing public hostility to the ‘the church’ or religion in general, but no evidence of particular hostility to church members.
- An ‘on-line’ community was identified as a particularly good way of creating a Christian community among young people. It was thought that this was best set up by the young church members themselves – as they understood it best.
- Existing events or courses, such as Soul Survivor or New Wine were identified as excellent resources for the church to use – taking a group to such an event may be much more effective than trying to create something within the village.
- Pangbourne’s ‘Come and Sing’ event (led by the Pangbourne Choral society) was seen as a particularly good example of an event that drew in lots of people who were not regular church-goers.

Communications

Some aspects of communication were discussed – returning in part to the theme of letting all members of the church know what was going on. YF were identified as potential ‘interviewers’ and ‘communicators’ – finding out about some aspect of the churches activities and then using the ‘special spot’ time in services to tell people about it or interview someone involved in it.

5. Manageable objectives (bearing in mind that the 'vacancy' is coming up)

The meeting agreed that the PCC would *focus on our communications so that people are more conscious of what is going on in our church life, in order that we improve our quality of life together and connect with the wider community.*

6. Next steps (what tasks, resources, structures, etc are needed to meet our objectives and who will be responsible for them)

Three tasks were identified in connection with the objective agreed on:

- a) To create a ‘**glossy brochure**’ of what goes on in the church for the village to be distributed in paper form and also put on the web-site. **Martin and Gordon** were identified to work on this (and it was suggested that Paul Thorley might be asked to help as he is a Graphic designer by training).
- b) **Getting YF involved** in improving our communications: YF to be asked to work on our internal and external communications through creating a web community linked to the church, researching some of the groups within the church and reporting on them to the wider church – such as through interviewing representatives in services. **Gordon** was identified as leading on setting this up.
- c) To continue the development of the **Church Directory** drafted by Kate Evans. **Tony and Jane** agreed to help work on this in consultation with Kate Evans.