

PARTNERSHIP FOR MISSIONAL CHURCH (PMC)



Report to the Congregations of St Catherine's Church & Cornwell Community Church, Tilehurst, January 2019

INTRODUCTION

This report has been produced by the PMC Steering Team, following the interviews and timeline event since the start of our PMC journey in June 2018. These have been opportunities for you to share your hopes and expectations together with remembering the highs and lows of your time here in this Parish. This information has been gathered and assimilated. From this, our challenge is to draw conclusions to try and establish what the Holy Spirit is calling us to do here in our Parish in Tilehurst. Over the next few months we will be holding a variety of further meetings and hope that you all will help us in the next stage of PMC. That is, to be open to what God is calling us to do.

Please join us at the meetings and continue to support and pray for PMC.

A TIME OF DWELLING

We offer you this report so that you can read it and “dwell” with the questions within it. We really appreciate and need everyone to engage with this process, as it is designed to be consultative. Your views matter. After this time of Dwelling, members of the Steering Team will be meeting with as many church members as possible, through mid-week groups and Sunday congregations, to discuss and gather feedback. This feedback will help us identify where God is leading us as a Parish.

FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS

This report contains the standard PMC provided questions the interviewees were asked (in blue boxes), followed by the observations made by the Diocesan PMC reading team. They raised some questions (in green boxes) for us to ponder.

We are seeking “*God’s preferred and promised future*” for our church at this time and place. This document is a step along the way.

PMC is a process. It’s about:

- A **deep** and *long-term* **cultural change** in congregational life towards “**being mission**” rather than just carrying out mission activities
- Discovering God as our *primary partner* in mission
- Being **in tune** with God’s dreams and desires for local communities

The first year of Listening has focused on listening to God and each other through interviews, and “*Dwelling in the Word*”. We have focused on Luke 10:1–12. Soon we will be listening to the wider community. We are looking and listening to see where God is already at work. During Year 2 (March 2019 – February 2020) we will experiment on how to be a truly missional church – a church which allows God to call us to join in His mission wherever it might be and offer our community a glimpse of God’s future, a *sign* of His reign.

PERMISSION TO FAIL

It may be that some **experiments** will **fail** but the important thing will be to learn and continue to experiment, building community connections as new plans emerge.

STEERING TEAM MEMBERS

The Steering Team leading this process is Sonia Ludford (Chair), Chris Addison, Jo Day, Caroline Heron, Jane Stokes, Valerie Poore and Richard Yates, with occasional help from churchwardens Richard Canning and Stuart Poore (who did our data gathering and statistical analysis on demographics and church attendance). Rev Gill Rowell is our PMC Spiritual Leader.

1

Tell a story about how you sense God's presence and activity in our congregation.

Observations from the answers:

- ✚ God's activity is experienced in *relationship and shared activity*.
- ✚ Prayers, and answers to prayers are **significant**.
- ✚ There is a **deep care** for each other.
- ✚ There is a **significant personal awareness** of God's presence and activity.
- ✚ It is significant that many responses were about **experiencing God** on the edge or outside of the church.



- How might we tell of God's activity more widely?
- Do we know what gifts God has given each of you? Can you name them?
- How might we be able to grow and share God's activity amongst us?
- How do we experience God on the edge or the outside of Church?

2

Describe an experience of profound worship you have had.

- ✚ **Everyone described an experience of God**, a large proportion of these were *profound experiences*, many of which have been in the corporate worship.
- ✚ There is a **rich encounter** with, and articulation of, *emotional and sensory experiences*.
- ✚ The congregation is **blessed** by people involved in *wider networks and experiences* of the Christian faith.



How might our depth of spirituality be turned outwards to join with what God is up to in our *community*?

3

Tell about the ways people fight in this congregation. Tell about a situation where you and other people were involved in a problem at church and how it was handled.

- ✚ Conflict is not a universal experience; **over half** the respondents did **not speak of any**. Those who did were clear that it **does exist** and a few said that *leaving church* may be one way it is dealt with.
- ✚ It *seemed* that a good number of answers to how conflict is resolved were *suggested approaches*.
- ✚ Speculations about St Catherine's and Cornwell Community Church merging in some way is still a tension for some people, with evident hurt.
- ✚ Some have a strong desire to resolve any conflicts that emerge, so that we can always work together going forward.



- Why are there different responses to the issue of conflict?
- How are our conflicts heard and explored and handled?

4

Tell a memory that gives you anxiety about the future of your congregation. Tell a memory that gives you hope.

- ✚ The answers are rich with hope but again, tensions between Cornwell Community Church and St. Catherine's emerge in the answers.

- Why do we think that there are tensions between St Catherine's and Cornwell Community Church?
- How might we respond to (a) the tensions and (b) the reasons for them?
- Is nostalgia about the past making our journey into the future difficult?
- How might or should "success" of the congregations be measured today?
- How might we listen to and engage young people?

5

If you were to leave the congregation for 5 years without any contact, what would you expect to see when you returned? What would you hope to see?

- ✚ There is a **deep affection** for the people in the congregations and a **hope** that they would still be there in five years.
- ✚ There is an **outward focus** in many of the answers and **many more hopes than anxieties**.
- ✚ A few people specifically express hopes for **staying linked** and even **strengthening the connections** between our two churches.



- Do we recognise ourselves as hopeful congregations?
- How might we express, explore and embody these hopes?
- How might members of both congregations bring their gifts to joining in with what God is up to in our communities?

6

Describe the congregation to someone new and tell them how they would be nurtured here.

- ✚ Welcome and friendliness appears often which is a **real strength**.
- ✚ The interviewees had previously detailed rich and deep *spiritual experience*, but **developing** and **growing spiritual life did not seem** to be a key part of the *nurture patterns* expressed.

- Do we agree that welcome and friendliness is a strength of our congregations?
- Do we know that newcomers feel the same?
- How do we check this out?
- Do we develop and grow spiritual life?
- *How might we do that?*

7

What tells you that God is present here in worship?

- Collective worship is something **very important** to the churches, a **vibrant and large range of positive experiences** were expressed.
- There is a **significant** amount of “charismatic” experience expressed and once again **hope ripples through the answers**.



How does, and how might, our Sunday worship life and experience connect with our Monday to Saturday life?

8

Tell us about how you and others feel about the changes in the congregation in the past three to five years.

- Many of the answers **tell a story**, *rather than* describing feelings about the changes.
- Some answers **see change** and some see **lack of change** – **very different experiences are expressed**.
- Nevertheless, many of the answers are **future looking** and **imbued with energy and hope**.



- How might we pull together and continue our PMC spiritual journey and discover God's preferred and promised future for us both practically and spiritually?
- How might the togetherness and separate gifting and callings be journeyed with – and supported?

SUMMARY of OBSERVATIONS

There were *really lovely comments* about the age range and mix of people, however in reality the listening exercise mainly engages the 50+ and no one below 30.

The development and existence of the Café might be a signpost and location where you can learn more about what God is up to.

Across the life of Cornwell Community Church and St Catherine's there seems to be much to celebrate but also tensions. You are really hopeful churches!

GROWTH AND DECLINE

Cornwell Community Church

- ✚ Around 20 regular attendees at Sunday services which include families and children, many of whom are also involved in mid-week activities at or with St Catherine's.
- ✚ A number of people attend Sunday worship less frequently.
- ✚ A larger number of people attend infrequently but still have an affinity with the church.

St Catherine's Church

- ✚ Loyal congregation actively involved in many diverse activities.
- ✚ In line with many other Church of England churches, Sunday service attendance declined from 140 in the 1990s to the current 50 or so, now characterised by an absence of families and children. Midweek Thursday 12.15 pm service attracts around 15 or so.
- ✚ The local community, including groups who use the church centre, do not engage with St Catherine's worship in any significant way, despite the development of the buildings and grounds.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND DEPRIVATION DATA

The parish is two thirds nominally Christian, and mostly *“less deprived than average”*, except Calcot, which is *“more deprived than average”*. The age range is broad, with a higher percentage of retired people near to St Catherine’s.

Since the Parish was redefined in 2007, the shape of the Parish has elongated, and the location of the two churches within it became more unbalanced. St Catherine’s Church and Cornwell Community Church are both at the northern end, in housing estates, and neither building is on a main road or bus route. Access from Calcot is not particularly easy and transport is needed for those who don’t have their own cars, or when buses are in short supply, and for those less able to walk up the hill. The Calcot taxi brings 2 to 5 people to worship at St Catherine’s on Sundays.

We trust that God is already at work in the many and varied groups and activities that take place in our Parish on Sundays and throughout the week. However, there is a need to raise more awareness of the church locally, and to address the needs of the Calcot community.

We would love to be more **relevant** to our community.

LEADERSHIP

There is no discernible pattern over the years between length of leadership, style of leadership and church growth and decline. Leadership structure needs to change in order to maximise giftings and callings. This will most likely come through reviewing PCC Action Groups and responsibilities, in order to meet current and future challenges. The recently formed Strategy Action Group (StAG) works with our current vicar to seek God’s guidance and implement initiatives. The need for succession planning in both congregations is important, but perhaps more especially for Cornwell, as it depends largely on lay leadership.

BUILDING USE AND TRAVEL

The church worships in two locations, one a **modern church building** (St Catherine's) and the other a **community hall** (Cornwell Community Church).

St Catherine's Parish Church is located in a housing estate, opposite a primary school. Recent extensions and refurbishment have increased its attractiveness and welcome, showing God's love for all who enter. It is used five days of the week by a preschool, and most afternoons and evenings by a variety of church and community groups. Use of the church space as a cafe has brought an increasing number of the local community in on a regular basis. Café Siena volunteers are *mostly church members* although we are *seeking assistance* from the local community, and we give opportunities to some with additional needs. Café Siena is open 10.00 am – 2.00 pm two days a week (Thursdays and Fridays).

Cornwell Community Church hires a community hall within a housing estate for Sunday worship and runs Cornwell 0-5s in the same location two mornings a week (Tuesdays and Thursdays).

St Catherine's Church has excellent facilities for people with special needs. School start and finish times can be busy on the roads, occasionally causing *friction* with church car park users as parents park in the church car park, but most events *avoid these times*. Flexible seating means the church space can be used for a variety of community events.

Use of the hall by the preschool gives *opportunities for mission* with young families. The church and the Garden Room are *open and available* for prayer all day during term time.

The neighbouring school, Birch Copse, uses the church for annual services and the head teacher warmly welcomes church involvement in assemblies. Out of the six other local schools, there is currently little contact with three of them, however relationships with Little Heath and Springfield Primary are warm and developing.

FINANCE: In 2018 our Parish mission and maintenance costs were £8,000 per month.

FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

It costs around **£96,000** per annum to run the two churches in our Parish.

- ✚ Our largest cost, as for every Church of England church, is our Parish Share. For our Parish this is **£57,688** per annum.
- ✚ Running our mid-week activities mostly break even.
- ✚ Income from hall lettings is just under £17,000, and hall running costs are roughly £7,000.
- ✚ Café sales over the year bring in around £10,000 and costs are just under that, so it is currently making a small profit.

Trends:

- ✚ **Planned income** declined from 2016 to 2018 – some have moved away, some have died, many on retirement incomes – but the Parish Giving Scheme has made a positive difference to monthly cash flow and giving has increased by 5.6%.
- ✚ **Extra income** from **Café Siena** (although also additional costs).
- ✚ **Reserves** had increased substantially to £22,000 by 2016 but **are now being eroded by costs**, currently around £11,000.

Encouragements:

- ✚ **Generosity** when *funds are requested* for a **specific** expense.
- ✚ **Willing participation** of volunteers (e.g. for the Cafe) which **helps to keep costs down**.

What might God be up to in these?

- ✚ Showing us that people **will respond positively** when they see there is a need.

Challenges:

- ✚ Lack of awareness that the **church's costs are rising** year by year, in the light of which...
- ✚ More (a) **money** and/or (b) **time** needs to be **given**

What might God be up to in these?

- ✚ Showing us that we *need to take ownership* of our responsibilities
- ✚ A **call to action** to do **God's work**

Anything else we noticed?

- ✚ Current financial **model** is **not sustainable** in the longer term – we are currently protected by income from **hall lettings** and **our reserves**.
- ✚ We need to balance community and church use with regard to **Cafe** space – could it be **open** for *more hours* each week?

THANK YOU

We are hugely grateful to all who took part in the interview process – those who carried out the interviews and those who were interviewed, and to Shirley Horsnell who oversaw the process. The responses from the independent PMC reading team were drawn together from interviews with 22 people. In their summary report, they emphasise that they are not telling the congregation what to do, but they are encouraging us to move forward in the light of their questions.

A full copy of the PMC Reading Team report on the interviews, including a summary of individual answers to the questions, is available on the St Catherine's website: **stcatherine-tilehurst.org.uk**, and a printed copy is available in a folder in the Café.

Other significant data was gathered too, as a part of this process, and you will find a summary of this data at the end of this report.

We hope you have found this report informative. When we meet in January and February 2019 (in mid-week groups and Sunday congregations) there will be opportunities to hear and listen to where your attention has lingered through this period of dwelling. We look forward to this time of sharing and hearing your ideas of what God might be saying about the future for us as a Parish.

With love and blessings,
Gill, Sonia and the PMC Steering Team.



If you would like to ask any questions or give any feedback, please contact anyone on the Steering Team (see page 2), or Rev Gill Rowell at rowellgill@gmail.com.