

How can we be the church our community needs?

Moving Forward

The mission course ended on Sunday 23rd October. On average 30 people attended each session, out of 55 attending overall. The course lived up to its promise in that the content was varied and interesting; the two hours certainly went quickly each time.

Some of what we did is up on the notice boards in the Buchan Hall; do take a look when you get a chance. The course covered a huge amount and the content each week is summarised below:

- Week 1 We learned how the church (the Church of England), since about 10-12 years ago, has taken to heart the need to think and act missionally; in other words, to look for where God is working in our communities and find ways of joining in.
- Week 2 We considered our rapidly changing world, the uncertainty that the rate and degree of change generates and the way the church needs to respond.
- Week 3 We explored the need for authentic community in a consumerist society, i.e. an individualistic, me-centred society, and we saw that authentic community was something the church can offer.
- Week 4 We discussed the need to re-imagine worship – to provide worship that connects with people.
- Week 5 We looked at the need to deepen discipleship and encourage new leadership.
- Week 6 We asked – ‘where do we go from here?’

Over the six weeks we found that ...

We need to **value tradition** – to treasure what we have. *But* it's finding out what *others* need that's important, not what *we* think they need, or insisting solely on what we need.

So ... we need to be **servicing the needs of others**. Within this, we saw that it's what God is already doing that matters. That's what we must discern and join in.

We found out the importance of **flexibility** in our approach. We saw that church may need to have a very different shape – different times and/or places. Also, if we can be more flexible and agile as an organisation that will help us around change and uncertainty.

We saw how important **building up community** is. We learned that church needs to offer four types of space – public, social, personal and intimate. We discovered that our relationships and the strength of our community is key. We need to be an honest,

forgiving, loving, vibrant (i.e. authentic) community (like the early church). We also explored the way community is changing; it can't easily be defined geographically anymore – most people belong to a number of different kinds of networks (e.g. sports club, workplace or pub). This networking, too, contributes to the changing shape of church.

We explored **worship that connects**. We learned about solid and liquid church; solid church being what we know – church at a certain time, in a certain place, following a certain format, and liquid church being much more about relationship and communication – worship that relates to real issues in a language people understand.

We saw that **discipleship** is a journey – something that grows through relationship with others – and through this we began to appreciate the importance of **small groups**.

We heard that **listening** is vital – listening is where all new ways of being church *must* start.

And, we recognised that we can **use our gifts** – in everything, including worship and leadership. We should no longer think of leadership as solely ordained leadership, but we should be recognising gifts and raising up lay leaders. We saw the potential we hold as a company of people.

In the final week we had a 'dreaming session' where we banned phrases like 'it will never work', 'we couldn't do that', 'we've tried that before' – and we painted and sketched out our ideas.

Some of those ideas were – something for enquirers/new believers, to 'be seen on the Green' came up more than once, there were ideas around sharing food in the pub or tea room, age groups we've not really focused on (30-50, older people), work with the lonely or those with money issues, offering something for BATS parents and carers or other church hall users, using technology in different ways, building on our own stories (what brought us to God or kept us at St. Mary's) and making more of community opportunities (e.g. a stall in the market place, contact with people moving into parish etc).

We then discussed what our next steps may be and there was a sense of urgency. However, we recognised that we need more information about our surrounding community; this is part of the vital first stage of 'listening' to the community. We recognised that we cannot do everything at once. We need to listen, prioritise, and focus our energy. We thought we might begin that process by meeting in the pub!

The PCC heard the above report on 7th November and agreed that we should go ahead as planned. So, we will meet as soon as it can be organised – probably in the Prince Fred.

There will be an open invitation to all who attended the course, but also to anyone else who would now like to join in. Please talk with Alan or Ruth if you would like any more information.