

Missional Church: What Does Good look like?

SUPPLEMENTARY FILE

Maureen Garner, The United Benefice of Blidworth and Rainworth, Diocese of Southwell & Nottingham

“How we discerned what God is up to”

Early in our Partnership for Missional Church journey, we were tasked to go out into our communities, and talk to people whom we felt to be people of peace. That is, people who were doing God’s work, whether they knew that that’s what they were doing or not! Where is God at work in our Communities?

We found it very difficult at first, how do you go and do something you are not used to, approach people you do not know well, and tell them something about your faith, your church, and that the local church wants to connect and work together with them?

All were welcoming and willing to listen, but not everyone was interested in joining with us, but still thought it was a ‘good idea’.

As a result we came together with about 50/50 church and community members to become the ‘People of Peace’. (Otherwise know by PMC as an expanded Missional Innovation Team). There are others who join us sometimes as part of our planning. We meet in Sam’s Workplace Community Café, as it was important that the community feel that we are part of them, rather than that we expect them to become a church group. However, each of our meeting start with prayer, and ‘Dwelling in the Word’, when there our members often bring out things which we have not considered.

Our aim is to work together in a peaceful community, and for members of the community to connect with each other. We are very keen, as a church, to make sure that people in the community know who we are and what we do, as well as to find out, and join in with things that are happening in the community and to join in with them.

“How I shared my faith as a result of PMC.”

Going out and talking to people was so scary, I was used to ‘talking God, and theology etc, I’d been a tutor on the diocesan basic theology course for several years, but these were people who came because they wanted to begin to discern God’s will in their lives. Going out cold, as it were, with others who were equally scared, was difficult. However, I now can talk to others much more easily. When we have community events, or I accept hospitality from other groups, I find that people say to me, ‘You’re from the church, what about...?’ or ‘Why are you doing this?’, and I am able to answer them and engage in conversations that I would never have dreamt of before.

We had our first ‘Angel Shower’ during Holy Week when we showered the 2 villages with over 900 handmade angels, each with an inspirational tag. We invited social media responses and were overwhelmed by the photographs and remarks made by the community. We did it again in 2019, when we had 1500 angels, and community groups helped to make them and to distribute them. This gave us the opportunity to talk about faith and church to people we would not otherwise have met.

“How we failed excellently and learned.”

We thought it was really important to do some work with children and young families, and our vicar had worked hard to engage with the local schools, so, with our Churches Together group we started a Messy Church. We had willing volunteers from our own and the local Methodist churches, and plenty of ideas, spent time in prayer and preparation, and some families came.

A couple of months went by, and the volunteers began to outnumber the participants. We decided to give it a break and start again in a different venue, at a different time, with a different name. When we got to the stage where only the Vicar's daughter and grandson came, we realised that this was not the right thing for us to be doing at present, and reluctantly, decided to stop. We know that we will have other opportunities to work with this group, and that knowing when to stop is as important as knowing when to start. God will help us, if we listen to what he wants, rather than what we think. Not, 'Help us to do what we want,' but, 'Help us to know what You want Lord'.

“Why it's worth persevering with PMC when it gets tough.”

There were times when we felt that we were fighting a losing battle with our own congregations. It seemed that we had little support, only PCC members were involved, and others thought that it was not something which concerned them. Willingness to change is not a great part of church life! People would join in with what we did in church services, but otherwise ignored us. Every time we went to a PMC cluster meeting we thought, 'Why are we doing this, its hard work and where is it getting us?' However meeting with other churches in our cluster, seeing what others were doing, celebrating what we had done and achieved brought us straight back, and we left uplifted and energised. Now, 4 years later, our congregations willingly join in with the slot asking 'Where have we seen God at work this month?' during a service. We have 'Good News Boards' which we use with our coffee shop and other events, and when reminded, people in the community use them.

Have we got bigger congregations? Not really, because people die and move away, but we do have others who have reinstated the numbers.

The Communities of our 2 villages know who we are, join in with our activities and welcome us into theirs. We work well together, particularly with the People of Peace group, and we feel that we are in a better place than before we started.

The fact that we now have Community Events which involve acts of worship and bring 400 people into our church grounds, must mean something., so let's not be discouraged when it seems a hard slog, but continue to work outside the building, end engage with others on their own ground, in the hope that we'll have a joint ground where God is.

Sue Barber and Ruth Hicks, St Peter's Church, Stockton, Durham Diocese

How the Clergy-Lay relationship changed through PMC

There has been a significant, measurable change in the congregation's ownership of mission in St Peter's post PMC. In the past the responsibility for mission was seen as the domain of priests, and prior to PMC only a handful of parishioners engaged in the mission work of the church compared with now, when almost all the congregation are involved in outreach in some way or another.

I cannot say the PMC process was easy but the positive changes in our church as a result of PMC have made it 100% worth the effort.

St Peter's Church was scheduled to begin PMC training in 2015 but when our vicar announced his retirement that year doubts were raised about us going ahead as a lay team. After much discussion and some pleading it was agreed we should be included in this cohort despite the vacancy of an incumbent. Mentorship would be provided by senior clergy in Durham Diocese. Our Team Leader had excellent leadership skills and each team member brought valuable skills from their previous employment.

At this stage the majority of the congregation were opposed to change, (evidenced from congregational interviews, informal conversations and the spiritual discernment exercise). Interest in PMC events was minimal and sometimes antagonistic, including aggressive criticism of Dwelling in the Word and verbal scepticism about the changes we could achieve.

Despite the opposition we persisted, remaining positive and committed to following the process. We kept everyone informed of progress through meetings, newsheets, posters and presentations during the main Sunday Service. Wherever possible we sought views, opinions and suggestions from the congregation so that the process was owned by all.

A noticeable turning point was the Away Day with the PCC facilitated by a diocesan enabling team member. This was just a year into PMC and to our surprise was productive and positive. We closed the meeting with six possible interventions with our community to focus on and present to the congregation, but more importantly a PCC that seemed to have shifted from sceptics to fans!

As we approached 2017 still without a vicar we continued to strive to discern God's will and maintain momentum. This year was arguably the most difficult as the Missional Innovation Team sought partners in the community. As with many things in life, although not obviously successful, our learning and experience in making contact with the community around our church was invaluable.

Then in April 2017 we were rewarded by the gift of a wonderful, warm and charismatic priest who wished to join us and support us in the missional work we had begun. He came, not with answers as priests might have done in the past, but with humility to share in our search and discern God's will, and with the authority of a deep relationship with God. Since Fr Bill's appointment we also have a new curate and the ethos and impetus of the whole church has been transformed.

The role of the congregation as disciples with equal responsibility for mission is accepted as the norm and almost every member of the congregation is involved with community projects, from numerous services for children including Messy Church, Toddler Praise and Holiday Club to Café Church and Big Breakfasts aimed at the isolated and vulnerable, to support of the Way Out project for street workers and ESOL café for non-English speaking ethnic groups; and these are just a sample of the outreach service our church is undertaking. There is a real buzz shared across the Congregation when people are involved in working WITH our community whichever aspect it is

PMC has enabled our church to grow and respond to God's will and our priests have found an environment from which God's kingdom may be sought and may grow. From a church that was protective and inward looking we have developed into an all-encompassing compassionate organisation that strives to reflect God's love.

We continue our journey with God with renewed confidence and we thank God for it.

Rev Richard Lamey, St Paul's, Wokingham, Diocese of Oxford

How we found partners in God's Mission

We invited a whole range of people to come together to talk about how to build community in the new estate being built on the edge of the parish. We were convinced by the PMC model of partnership that we would be able to do more if we worked together. At ten to 8 we stopped pouring drinks and came together to pray, and we prayed really hard that somebody would turn up for the meeting. And they did.

There were people from the Council and the local residents association. There were Councillors and Headteachers and people from other Churches. There was a huge amount of energy in the room, and lots of ideas, and a real sense of vision emerging- everybody wanted the people moving into the new housing to feel welcome and at home. We felt that we would be able to help with that and then step back to allow the new residents to build the community they wanted to be part of.

God was at work in building the relationships we built on. He was at work in the room as we developed a vision for what a flourishing community is, and he has been at work ever since in opening up new opportunities for us to work in partnership.

We'd always have wanted to be involved in the new housing estates but, without PMC, we would have tried to do things on our own. We feel that we know what we should do without taking the time to stop and listen to other people and to God. And it's always more fun and more creative when we work with other people, pursuing a common vision.

And at the end of the meeting everyone from Church breathed a sigh of relief that it had gone so well- and then a Councillor asked "So when are you going to call the next meeting?"

Paul Armitage, St Paul's, Wokingham, Diocese of Oxford

"Why it's worth persevering with PMC when it gets tough."

PMC is full of jargon. For example, "visioning for embodiment", "missional adaptive challenge" and "bi-cultural bridge community" are a few of our congregations' favourites. Whilst some of the terminology may be familiar to some from other contexts, it is obscure to most. This jargon can become a barrier to engagement with the PMC process either because it is inherently difficult to grasp or as a convenience to engage no further than a certain point. However, the Spiritual Practices at the core of PMC come to the rescue. The key feature is that each of the practices are applied, by definition. When enough people in lay and clergy leadership teams, PMC Steering Committees, Missional Innovation Teams and local advocates begin to live out the practices, the formal language of the PMC process becomes less important. The meaning becomes more accessible as people see

their friends sat next to them in Church begin to live out the meaning behind the words. This is one of the two most important moves in dismantling the jargon barrier. The other is communicating that the practical activities and attitudes adopted by PMC advocates are explicitly related to the PMC process (and, yes, even related to the jargon). It is important to note, though, that this need not last forever. Once there are sufficient advocates – in PMC terms, the “tipping point” is passed – the jargon, if still in use, and even the process itself fade into the background. People are just “doing mission”. At this point, the culture change that PMC advocates has been effected.

An example is of “Dwelling in the World”. A re-phrasing to explain and demonstrate the seeking out, observation and relating of God’s Kingdom Advancing can lead to greater engagement through testimony in services, keeping an accessible written record or discussion over coffee. The name of the Practice is less important than the activity itself. Persistence removes the jargon as a barrier simply because it is no longer needed.