

St John the Baptist Ermine, Lincoln

PARISH DEVELOPMENT DAY

October 2007

A summary and report of the discussions on the day

Introduction

Over the past nine years, we have taken a very proactive approach to planning our development as a worshipping community here at St Johns. This has taken the form of two action plans which have helped us to shape our prayer, our service to God and to the community. Reports of these plans are available and will not be repeated here.

At the end of 2006, the PCC agreed that we would take a break from action plans for a few months, to allow us to pray and think about what our next steps as a parish should be. At that meeting, it was agreed that we should consider using the material available through the "Healthy Churches Handbook" (Robert Warren, Church House Publishing). Reviewing the handbook and its approach, the PCC agreed that it would be helpful to put on a day to consider how this material might shape our prayer and discussion.

The material included in the "Healthy Churches Handbook" has been used extensively throughout the Church and in many different contexts and church traditions. It is a practical guide designed to help churches to identify their strengths and weaknesses and to discover what action to take in order to develop the health of the church.

The aim of the day was to consider our current position as a parish church and to begin to develop a vision for the future.

The programme for the day was as follows:

- 10:00am Eucharist
- 10:30am The seven marks of mission
short talk and interactive session
- 11:30am The church profile
- 12:30am Lunch
- 1:15pm Fresh expressions
dvd and summary
- 1:45pm What do we need to work on?
- 2:30pm Action planning and what next

The seven marks of a healthy church

We started by looking at the seven marks of a healthy church

1. > > > Energised by faith

rather than just keeping things going or trying to survive.

In this sort of parish you will find

- worship and sacramental life: move people to experience God's love
- motivation: energy comes from a desire to serve God and one another
- engages with scripture: in creative ways that connect with life
- nurtures faith in Christ: helping people grow in, and share, their faith

2. > > > outward looking focus

with a 'whole life' rather than a 'church life' concern.

In this sort of parish you will find

- deeply rooted in the local community, working in partnership with other denominations, faiths, secular groups and networks
- passionate and prophetic about justice and peace, locally and globally
- actively finds ways to communicate faith in Christ
- makes connections between faith and daily living
- responds to human need by loving service

3. > > > seeks to find out what God wants

rather than letting our own preferences set the church agenda.

In this sort of parish you will find

- vocation: open to the Spirit's leading about what we should be and do
- vision: develops and communicates a shared sense of where we are going
- mission priorities: consciously sets both immediate and long-term goals
- makes sacrifices, personal and corporate, in living out the faith
- able to call for and make sacrifices, personal and corporate, in bringing about the above and living out the faith

4. > > > faces the cost of change and growth

rather than resisting change and avoiding failure.

In this sort of parish you will find

- while embracing the past, it dares to take on new ways of doing things
- takes risks: admits when things are not working, and learns from experience
- crises: responds creatively to challenges that face the church and community
- positive experiences of change: however small, are affirmed and built on

5. > > > operates as a community

rather than functioning as a club or religious organisation.

In this sort of parish you will find

- relationships: are nurtured so people know they are a part of a community of faith (often through small groups) in which they find opportunities for service
- leadership: lay and ordained work as a team to develop appropriate expressions of all seven marks of a healthy church
- lay ministry: the different gifts, experiences and faith-journeys of all are valued and given expression in and beyond the life of the church

6. > > > makes room for all

being inclusive rather than exclusive.

In this sort of parish you will find

- welcome: works to include newcomers into the life of the church
- children and young people: are helped to belong, contribute and be nurtured in their faith
- enquirers are encouraged to explore and experience faith in Christ
- diversities: coming from social and ethnic backgrounds, mental and physical abilities and age differences are seen as a strength and sought after

7. > > > does a few things and does them well

focused rather than frenetic.

In this sort of parish you will find

- does the basics well: especially public worship, pastoral care, stewardship and administration
- occasional offices: make sense of life and communicate faith
- being good news as a church: in its attitudes and ways of working enjoys what it does and is relaxed about what is not being done

The church profile

Having looked at each mark, we were each asked to score each mark on a scale from 1 to 6 for our church, to describe what we see is happening in our church.

A score of 1 = weak and holding us back

A score of 2 = only a few signs of this

A score of 3 = some evidence of this

A score of 4 = we are making progress on this

A score of 5 = evidence of much of this

A score of 6 = this is a strength.

It was important that everyone gave a score for each mark. In the event, not everyone did, so three of our total scores were lower than they might have been. After, we had added all the scores together, we put them on a chart.

The full chart of scores at the back of this report, but here are the overall totals:

Energised by faith	85
Outward looking focus	90
Seeks to find out what God wants	67 (only 18 of 20 possible responses)
Faces the cost of growth and change	71
Operates as a community	94
Makes room for all	83 (only 18 of 20 possible responses)
Does a few things and does them well.	79 (only 18 of 20 possible responses)

We spent some time looking at the responses, where we agreed, where we differed, where we need to develop (which you can see at the back of the report) and thinking about how we saw ourselves as a church. We were pleased to note a generally positive approach to each of the marks.

Mark	1 low	2	3	4	5	6 high	total
1 Energised by faith		√	√√	√√√√√√√√	√√√√√√√√		85
		1x2*	2x3	8x4	9x5		
2 outward looking focus			√√√√√	√√√√√	√√√√√	√√√√√	90
3 seeks to find out what God wants			√√√√√√√√	√√√√√√√	√√√		67 **
4. faces the cost of change and growth	√	√	√√√√√	√√√√√√√	√√√√√	√	71
5 operates as a community			√√√	√√√√√√√	√√√√√√√√	√√√	94
6 makes room for all			√√√	√√√√	√√√√√√√√	√√√	83 **
7 does a few things and does them well			√√√	√√√√√√√	√√√√√√√√	√	89 **

* scores are calculated by adding the number of ticks in the box by the number at the top of the column.

Adding up the scores in each box gives us the overall rating for that mark.

** two people did not give a score for this mark, so this score may not be fully representative and should be higher

From the results, it would seem that **we are particularly strong on**

Operates as a community	94
Outward looking focus	90
Energised by faith	85
Makes room for all	83

What we might need to work on:

Does a few things and does them well.	79
Faces the cost of growth and change	71
Seeks to find out what God wants	67

We then tried, from the results, to **assess our strengths**. We saw these as follows:

- We offer a good welcome
- We have strong community links
- We have strong and developing ecumenical links
- We have one priest and one parish (this is rare nowadays)
- Relationships in church are strong
- Our communication is good and people know what is going on
- We use people's gifts
- We have a range of different types and styles of worship
- We are a servant church
- We affirm what people do and recognise important stages in their journeys of faith
- The people of God are a strength
- We can see our development as a church going on all the time

Then we looked at **where we had different ideas:**

We felt that we did not always face the cost of change and growth. It is easy to face the cost if the sacrifice is not yours. We need to communicate why change happens. People need to feel secure, but should be ready to relinquish special status if circumstances and ministries change or develop.

Then we looked at **what might be holding us back:**

- More prayer is always needed
- Listening to God to seek what God what us to do
- Perhaps we have an obscured or fragmented vision
- Finance is always a problem – our running costs are high
- People do not always communicate effectively, or read the weekly bulletin

We need people to match the vision – we have a lack of leaders and people do not always have the confidence to step up to these roles

We need to be building teams

Personal agendas and kingdoms can lead to a lack of understanding of the whole picture

Complacency and a clinging to tradition for its own sake.

Fresh expressions

Following lunch, we took some time out to watch a dvd showing how the “Fresh expressions” initiatives are taking shape throughout the country. “Fresh expressions” is used to describe new ways of churches responding to the change in people’s patterns of life. We saw short films about a variety of approaches including; Café church; Church for skateboarders; Living room church for students Messy church for families to share Many of these projects operate on days other than a Sunday and are informal and relaxed in their approach to worship.

Moving on

Having identified our church profile from the results of the chart, we then looked at what the results might mean for us a church:

1. > > > Energised by faith

rather than just keeping things going or trying to survive.

We thought that this meant for us connecting with all people and maintaining the motivation and energy we need as a church. Occasional offices (weddings, funerals, baptisms) are occasions when the energy of the church could be said to be “catching”!.

2. > > > outward looking focus

with a 'whole life' rather than a 'church life' concern.

We thought that this meant for us

Looking at further developments on Ermine West

Keeping a close eye on people’s needs in the community as a whole and developing groups or responses to meet those needs

Keeping working with other groups and individuals in the community.

3. > > > seeks to find out what God wants

rather than letting our own preferences set the church agenda.

We thought that this meant for us

A lot of prayer and discernment : what does God want?

Developing a shared vision of exactly what is needed and being aware of the sacrifice that this might entail

Being clear about who we are looking to serve

Asking the question: are we listening to God?

Allowing new ministries to develop, with some perhaps being prepared to step aside so that new ministry can be a positive force in the church

We need to develop mission priorities – not just good ideas

4. > > > faces the cost of change and growth

rather than resisting change and avoiding failure.

We thought that this meant for us

Education, education, education!

Being prepared to challenge peoples' perceptions

Not being afraid of change

Being prepared to go forward with new ideas and allow past "failures" to be revisited positively

Need to show understanding and sensitivity

Being prepared to accept new forms of ministry

Everyone thinking creatively

Reaching out to the community

Daring to embrace new ways and being prepared to take risks. We thought that this meant for us

5. > > > operates as a community

rather than functioning as a club or religious organisation.

We thought that this meant for us

Outreach information to be more widely available

Needing to identify appropriate skills (do we have anyone who might initiate a skateboarding ministry?!)– or a project that is tailored to the needs of the community and to the resources that God has given us.

Importance of nurture of new and developing faith

Need to co-operate and work together more closely.

6. > > > makes room for all

being inclusive rather than exclusive.

We thought that this meant for us

Ensuring that people new to faith and welcomed appropriately by the whole community, not just by those who go out of their way to exercise this ministry

Making our activities representative of the whole community

7. > > > does a few things and does them well

focused rather than frenetic.

We thought that this meant for us

Using all our resources in our worship (especially children in children's services)

More involvement and support

Show that we enjoy our faith

Put on more games evenings and social activities

Focus on things with a theme (ie Caribbean evening or Pudding tasting!)

What our response might be

Having considered these issues, we then tried to identify which of the elements of the seven marks most needs addressing, and we came up with these broad headings:

COMMUNITY (welcome, enquirers, activities, outreach)

EDUCATION (nurture)

PRAYER (related to action)

SHARED VISION (risk taking and willingness)

Having identified these areas, we split up into groups, electing ourselves which groups to join. Each group had to identify what action could be taken and what we already offered within each of those headings. This is what we came up with, a mixture affirming what we already do but also challenging us to think afresh.

VISION

We need a church that goes out to the community

We need a church that has an understanding of the need for change

We need a church that appeals to the younger community (possibly through services held on other days in addition to Sundays)

We need a church that cherishes community links.

We need a church that encourages participation

COMMUNITY

This group also echoed what the VISION group had developed. In addition:

We need a church that is not just the building

We need a church that is opening doors through the relationships it builds

We need a church that uses young people in our worship

We need a church that responds to people at every stage in life

We need a church that has a diversity of activities

We need a church that can learn lessons from services such as Christingle and apply those lessons elsewhere in the liturgical year

We need a church that can respond to different worship patterns.

EDUCATION

We need a church that nurtures new people through housegroups, sharing fellowship and food together and offers opportunities through, for example, the Parish Foundation Course

We need a church that explains, educates and communicates

We need a church that values occasional offices (baptisms, weddings, funerals) as opportunities for growth

We need a church in which all are involved in all activities and in which people are enabled to take part

We need a church to develop new ideas (ie Messy Church), but also one that knows why we want to do it

We need a church that listens to voices other than our own (ie lunch club)

We need a church that advertises its presence through its activities and people

We need a church that understands its own story and history

PRAYER

We need a church in which prayer is made accessible – much prayer happens, but there is always room for more!

We need a church in which people can encounter and experience different types of prayer

We need a church in which small groups do not have exclusive fixed group membership

We need a church in which needs can be expressed in prayer

We need a church in which healing is expressed and experienced and those who mourn can be supported effectively

Conclusion

The reason why the seven marks of a healthy church are as they are is because they reflect the life of Christ. He was the one supremely who was

Energised by faith
Had an outward looking focus
Sought to find out what God wanted
Did a few things and did them well
Faced the cost of change and growth
Operated in a community
Made room for all

These marks form a map not only for how the church should order its life, but also how we should live. We are called to be those people who in following Christ

Are energised by faith
Have an outward looking focus
Seek to find out what God wanted
Do a few things and did them well
Face the cost of change and growth
Operate in a community
Make room for all

In our time together, we joined in worship, in prayer, in sacrament, in study and in enjoyment. From that time, we developed ideas of how St John's needs to develop. We already do so much, but this day has helped to sharpen our perception of what God is saying to us and how he wants us to move on in his love.

This report has tried to give you a flavour of what we did on the day, and now we would like your thoughts.

Take some time to look through this report and how we were led through the day. We would be very interested in your response to the report as a whole and in your response to these questions.

Do you agree with our assessment of what sort of church we are?

Do you have any ideas that we might include in our future discussion?

What do you think our priorities should be?

How do you see St Johns over the next 10 years?

What do you think God is calling us to do?