

Responses from St Mary's Church Cerne Abbas.

These responses represent the views of all but one member of the PCC.

1. What is the 'Personality and Character' of your local church?

- A beautiful and historic village church with a small but strong congregation mostly made up of retired people plus some younger families
- Our Church community comprise of a high percentage of elderly people. There is a very caring and supportive congregation. We are also fortunate to have young families in the community. Therefore there is a conflict between the ages as which type of service should be conducted.
- Elderly, caring, supportive but not instinctively given to new thinking. Usual BCP/CW divide.
- Friendly, conservative,
- Friendly, however whilst families are welcome, not enough is done to make them feel at ease.
- Warmth and a strong sense of inclusivity under the leadership of the vicar who is totally committed to the spiritual well-being of the congregation.
- When I think of St Mary's I think of a microcosm of the village that gets together to worship in 3 distinct groups (in different ways). The congregations care for their memberships, but with a few notable exceptions could not be described as particularly outgoing or welcoming. St Mary's is so much about the building, which is beautiful and a wonderful place in which to worship.
- Traditional, not very flexible, polarised into BCP and more modern congregations, ageing (most people over 60), welcoming, as long as no-one rocks the boat, covertly rather than overtly spiritual, liberal rather than evangelical, supportive of those who are ill or in need of care.

2. What are the priorities of your local church?

- To offer church services to suit the various needs of the congregation and to provide a welcoming and pastoral role in the local community.
- The centre of village life, teaching Christian values, putting these into practice and supporting the local community.

- There is good communication and pastoral care within the community, and support of both local and overseas charities. People who are members of the congregation and non-church goers are very keen on the maintenance of the fabric of our superb church and 'The Friends of St. Mary's' has recently been sent up to encompass all the community.
- Pastoral care, interaction with the community, support of selected local and overseas charitable organisations, maintenance of the fabric of the building.
- To preserve the fabric of the church
To manage the limited resources to maximum effect rather than to increase funds by increasing members' commitment to the life of the church
- We need to be thinking more about growing the congregation and less about the financial state of our church. It is important to get people to give, but perhaps we are missing the point that, if we prioritised growth, increase in income should automatically follow.
- If we look at the minutes of the PCC - the priority is focused on solving the financial issues that potentially threaten the mission in the Church.
- At the moment it seems to be fundraising, fundraising , fundraising.

3. Is there one thing you would like to take on in the coming year (recognising that may mean you may need to stop doing something else)?

- Spiritual input/growth of the membership and clear leadership is needed before anything new can be tackled.
- Would like to see more done in the encouragement of families into our church. Not sure how?
- As young families are now drawn, or thanks to low cost housing, are able to live in the village, we have a superb Church of England First school. The school attend Lent Lunches and hold their Christmas Nativity play etc. in the School. If it was possible and funds allowed it would be excellent if some form of Sunday school could be held.
- It is vital that we think of ways to engage with those on the fringes of our church and come up with suitable ways to grow our congregation. The reality is that this won't be achieved by persuading people to turn up on a Sunday morning for a HC service whether it is CW or BCP. Instead we need to find something that appeals to people

at their level. Linking rural life with spirituality is proving very popular and perhaps is something we need to focus more on. More could be done to build on the really strong Christian grounding the village children receive in our CofE school. The trick of course is not to neglect those who rightly or wrongly cannot see beyond their traditional BCP worship style.

- In an ideal world some form of Sunday school for the young people. The monthly Come Celebrate! service (even this has dropped the former "Family Service" designation) is not really drawing in the youngsters.
- I really feel that much more focus on encouraging families to attend services would be hugely beneficial in so many ways. This may well call for a Parish room, to facilitate Sunday school type facilities to allow Children to attend part of the mainstream services with their parents.
- No, I feel that I have enough to do with LPA work and other duties.

4. Are there ways in which we can work together to achieve more?

- We already do a certain amount with other churches within the benefice. We could encourage people to participate more in joint events and services.
- It would be good to socialise more with another church in the benefice.
- There are already four Churches within the Benefice and the Vicar does the best he can to spread the Sunday services and a Joint PCC meeting is held each year.
- It is difficult to 'work together to achieve more' when one church in our benefice is in a totally separate valley and the other two have such small congregations. What our parish already does is support the two smaller churches with our presence at their services – something that is vital to keep their numbers viable.
- Apart from avoiding duplication in our targets for charitable giving and ensuring that the spread of services on any given Sunday is coherent, this is hard to answer since these are quite separate and distinct communities.
- This requires dialogue, shared goals and commitment – I do not perceive any overt desire to achieve these, let alone any specific projects.

- I would like to see Parishes being twinned with others in the diocese who are very different to promote better understanding and sharing of ideas and best practices.
- Many opportunities through various elements in the congregation and personal objectives to strengthen the commitment to church life.

5. How can we best measure the quality and impact of church life?

- Quite simply by the growth in attendance in church and an increase in active church membership with its consequent positive knock-on impact on community relations.
- One metric could be the number of people who become Christians (confirmed?) in a year as a % of the population in the Parish. Another metric could be the amount donated in time and money to Charitable organisations.
A third option would be the impact of the social responsibility strategy initiatives.
- By growth in membership, significantly increased giving, a greater sense of shared purpose, deeper spiritual commitment, willingness to adapt to 21st century Christianity, by what the church does outside of church services to draw people together.
- Through involvement and awareness of the role of the Church in the village. Generally, Salisbury Diocese reaches out to all Deaneries and Benefices and keeps us in touch with events and is not remote in any way.
- I think it is difficult to measure this.

THREE GENERAL COMMENTS WERE MADE

- The most striking reaction I had when listening to the Bishop was that he is assuming, quite reasonably in my view, a common sense of vision and purpose in the PCC, let alone the congregation. I recognise that I am a relative newby (4 1/2 years in the congregation, 3 years on the PCC) but I have no recollection of any discussions that could by any stretch of the imagination attempted to address any of the questions. Perhaps that is something that the LPA's discuss?
My experience of the PCC is a focus on finance (for understandable reasons) but maybe we might be more successful at solving the dilemma if we had a common sense of

purpose that wasn't limited to an assumption that we just want more of the same, whatever that might be?

- When you worship in a church everything seems very local, and getting involved and helping in your community is important. Visits to the cathedral are lovely but to me seem a world away from us here in a village location looking after ourselves. The 37,000 on electoral roll and 27,000 worshippers is interesting. and as raised at our PCC the other night, much is put on those regular attenders. I don't advocate that we should charge to come into our church but more ways must be found to obtain funding from visitors to St Mary's.
- On a general level, I feel that the CofE has lost its way in the last few years and is now less the 'Daily Telegraph at Prayer' than the Guardian! The spiritual life and beliefs of Christians in the nation appear to be retreating against the very strident voices of secularism and 'equality'; yet, 47 bishops can find time to write a letter to The Times attacking Government policy on reductions in the Welfare benefits bill. I am quite sure that these bishops would be better employed contemplating the causes of the declining understanding (and congregations) in the country of what the church is about and concentrating on that. The recent 'debate' on 'same sex marriage' is a good and recent example of how the church's views were either ignored or received in a hostile manner by the opposite forces; nobody was listening and, to be blunt, the trumpet was pretty uncertain anyway.
- I'm afraid mine is a rather nebulous/woolly list and cannot reflect the reality – just my narrow perception of reality, and coloured by a sense that there is little purpose or direction in our church and mirrored in my own life. I am also puzzled that the response of our church can be distilled from a few observations by a few individuals rather than stemming from a full and frank discussion by the members/benefice (even if there was an appetite for such debate, which seems doubtful).