

'Let Us Talk'

A response from St Edward's Corfe Castle

Introduction and background

We are a rural church in a rural benefice containing the large village of Corfe Castle, two small villages, and the hamlet of Steeple. There is farming land around the three small villages and most people living in them are agricultural workers. Many of the cottages, particularly in Church Knowle, are second homes and let as holiday cottages. Corfe Castle also has a large proportion of holiday cottages, and there are two holiday cottage businesses operating in the village with many of the village women working as cleaners for them. Corfe Castle houses many retired people, with the people of working age tending to work outside the immediate area. As a whole, the area of this Benefice is a popular holiday destination.

We have recently had a series of conversations with St Edward's PCC divided into three small groups, meeting separately, to discuss how we can best go forward as a church, and including 'the Bishop's questions' in the debate. Although it was St Edward's PCC, we all know PCC members and congregations of the other three churches, and are familiar with the 'ethos' and character of each.

Having had these discussions at Corfe Castle we are now ready for further discussions both with the 3 other much smaller parishes and then as a benefice as a whole.

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

Each church/parish in the benefice has its own character, but, broadly speaking, the 'local church' is friendly and welcoming, conservative with a small c, but with a forward-looking younger-minded minority. Worship is relatively formal. Tensions arise partly due to people moving here, often on retirement, having had different experiences of church life and with a variety of expectations. We attempt to manage this creatively.

What are the priorities of your local church?

To keep the flame of faith alive in the Benefice. We are very conscious of the need to develop ways of doing this appropriate to the present day and recognising many have no or

little experience of Christian life, worship and faith. We realise this affects our present style of church life and worship and may lead to developments both within and alongside these.

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

The most urgent task is to continue to repair the church building and make it watertight. We have recently made good and satisfying progress in this area. This leads on to our next task of re-ordering and developing the building to make it comfortable and fit-for-purpose in this 21st century. Apart from that, we want to embark on conversation with the families of our school-children (Corfe Castle VC Primary School) to see if they would welcome a short family-oriented service and, if so, what day of the week and what time. (The new school hall, nearing completion, will provide a good venue for these sorts of activities.)

Are there ways in which we can work together with neighbouring churches to achieve more?

We have friendly relations with the one other church in Corfe Castle, the Evangelical Congregational Church. Differences of approach and theology make further co-operation difficult. Nonetheless, we remain open to whatever is possible.

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

Not necessarily by congregational or Electoral Role numbers, although, inescapably, that is one sort of measure. The visitors' books in the churches make specific mention of the welcome and friendliness people have found here, which is another sort of measure. The strength of feeling in villages for 'their church' (meaning the building) is another. Perhaps the main measure is the neighbourliness of village inhabitants, the care we take of each other in our daily lives which, whether realised or not, is based on the commandment to 'love your neighbour as yourself', and Jesus' parable of the Sheep and Goats illustrating that love of 'neighbour' is one way of loving God with all we have to offer.

Produced by Corfe Castle PCC meeting in small groups.

(For clarification, or further detail, please contact the Rev Ian Jackson.)