

February 2013.

Benedictus, Bowerchalke, Salisbury, SP5 5AY

Dear Bishop Nicholas,

You have asked for the response to several important questions. It is hard for a Benefice of 13 Churches to answer as you would find helpful, when (as I know from regularly preaching in all) each church is - often markedly - different.

As an optimist, I see the best in people, look for any little places to encourage growth, and love God's creation. The Personality and Character of my local church is welcoming, friendly, with a growing social awareness (Collection point for Trussell Trust).

As a pragmatist I would have a sadder view: a congregation refusing Outreach, an idea that the church is dying, and a Treasurer who describes this church's charitable giving as "profligacy".

Priorities: a few who accept small changes (a quiet area for Reflection, with leaflets - 'How do I pray', 'Death and Dying', 'Confirmation', 'Who is Jesus', - books, and free Bibles to take away). Many for whom Church is a pleasant Sunday habit, which should not change (1662). All would \*say\* the priority is to "get more people in church". However, there are those described best as 'Gatekeepers' (who are NOT the original families) whose Managerial experience is about control: and whose underlying pessimism ('the church is dying') overwhelms the smaller voices of the active ones.

This is a double tragedy: good people, patiently encouraged to come to church through personal contact, are then positively discouraged from involvement. The PCC is small, and dominated by the negativity of a few - who appear genial, and are likeable and have thus become Office holders!

How can we best measure the quality and impact of church life? Surely, by the variety of activities each week...if the church is only used on Sunday, and although unlocked, has no coffee mornings, book-exchange groups, etc then the quality and impact is missing, however much individuals may do (which is not seen as 'the church').

The whole enquiry is best summed up thus: YES we can achieve more together; through Mission, Stewardship, Outreach.

Perhaps the most important suggestion is this: that the Diocese requires every individual church (1) to conduct a Stewardship Campaign once every 5 years; and (2) to obtain the Archdeacon's Permission, oversight, and de-brief.

The Archdeacon will thus oversee the initial selection of the planning group, ensuring that no 'Gatekeepers' are on it, and the members are enthusiastic; and ensure that all attend together a Stewardship Training Day.

If this Stewardship campaign is to be effective: it needs to follow the Diocese's own template: excellent letters, delivered to each household with a return visit a week later to answer questions and collect Time and Talent forms. Invitations - also delivered - to a social evening with wine and nibbles, to see manned displays of all that the Living Church is doing, with a short PowerPoint presentation by a capable speaker. The emphasis is on welcoming involvement, and inviting volunteers by showing what is already happening - bell-ringing; flowers; archives (family history); Messy Church; social activities (coffee mornings) etc.

I hope very sincerely that you will find this a useful contribution to the debate.

With prayers and warm wishes, Lavender Buckland LLM

Lavender Buckland

**The questions being asked are:**

1. What is the 'Personality and Character' of your local church?
2. What are the priorities of your local church?
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)?
4. Are there ways in which we can work together to achieve more?
5. How can we best measure the quality and impact of church life?