

## **Foxham Feedback on 'Let Us Talk'**

The below is compiled from individual responses from 4 people and a PCC meeting. Input was also given at the Calne Deanery Synod as part of the Marden Vale Team response.

### **1. What is the personality and character of your church?**

People are the church so look to the way the people present themselves to others. Our church is very much based in old church traditions and new ideas have to be introduced slowly before they are assimilated. This is not to say new ideas are not eventually accepted but they do take people out of their comfort zones and this is never easy to come to terms with.

The character is very much based on community spirit and helping one another and working for God through this.

Foxham church provides a calming, relaxed and tranquil environment in which to immerse oneself in thought and prayer. It speaks to me on a personal level because its small and reminds me of the village church I attended as a child.

The materialistic view of the church itself with its charmed surroundings, well kept graveyard and visual approach to the church is a good start to the beginning of the inside.

Through the door you will see a small but inviting peace with the stained glass window looming over the whole body which to me is the beauty of any church and forms a great bond to the atmosphere without having parishioners, although they do play an important part to the welcoming and personality of the church.

The personality and character of St. John the Baptist Church in Foxham has been shaped by its position as a Chapel of Ease to Bremhill for most of its life, and lately as a Parish in its own right in the Salisbury Diocese. It has never had its own resident vicar so has had to manage its own affairs very much on its own, obviously with the support in the past of the Vicars of Bremhill and more latterly the Vicar of Hilmarton and Derry Hill. In this respect it is probable that many other Churches have to manage in this way, with the ever decreasing numbers of clergy available.

For this very reason Foxham Church has good reason to be proud of its place in the community. This is not a feather in the cap of the present congregation and residents, but an acceptance and thanks of the dedicated work of generations who have lived in the village.

In the past the communities of these small villages were made up of families who lived, worked and played in the village. Nowadays it is much more a moving population with people passing through on a regular basis, making it more difficult to create a cohesive community. The fact that this village with this moving population is still willing to support the institutions of the village and to be able to pull together in times of need - example the re-shingling of the Church Tower and the re-roofing of the body of the Church, is a great credit to the community.

To sum up the answer to this question, the Church has good reason to have pride in its community and to stand proud in the memory of all for generations who have wanted to maintain it.

### **2. What are the priorities of your local Church?**

This was reflected in the main by the answer to Q1. Other points raised were to try to cut through red tape and keep it simple, after all PCC's past and present have accomplished many difficult projects to keep St Johns in a very good state and maintain a steady and regular number of worshippers at our services. Archdeacon Worsley asked what we thought was our

greatest challenge. Most said it was to attract more people into the church, How to do this? It was agreed that communication was crucial. Perhaps tiny steps lead into an awareness of what the church could offer, for example a coffee morning once a month or holding more functions like a choral evening could work. Unity was another word used, find a way forward. Rev Worsley mentioned that the National Church Community Fund may be able to help on projects such as installing toilets so that we can hold more events. "From little acorns mighty oaks grow".

- 1 Priorities are not really something we talk about as our main aim is to keep the church going and to raise enough money to do this so this has to be the overriding priority.
- 2 Obviously we would wish to increase the involvement of new members, not necessarily in the congregation as Sundays are not conducive to getting the young as they have other activities and often this is the only day families have together with the way working patterns are now. Times have changed since villages held a mainly agriculture based workforce, who lived and worked in the village.

To encourage new people to attend and become involved by putting forward views and ideas. To be available to all and to maintain regular services and by working together as a team to keep Foxham church on the map!

The priority of the church is to keep it alive and kicking. Paying our way with many fundraising events and making the festivals in the church calendar very important and interesting to the whole community thus hopefully swelling the congregation and teaching our Christian way of life to young and old.

To be available for the whole community whether they want it for one special occasion or on a regular basis for worship. To be able to accept change which has been carefully thought through and benefits the Church, to be open in their dealings, either ministers, P.C.C. members or ordinary church members, but to be prepared to talk through problems, and not to force through change which has not been fully thought about and agreed by a majority vote of those affected, either P.C.C. or whole congregation. If there are disagreements, and all communities have them from time to time, to be tolerant of the views of others, to be prepared to discuss and come to a compromise, or in some cases to agree to differ.

Continued pride in the church and its place in the community and a need to find a way to encourage young people to join the congregation. It is important to show respect for the generations in the past who have kept the church going. A cut in the 'red tape' was suggested – keep things simple, after all PCCs past and present have accomplished many difficult projects to keep St Johns in a very good state and maintain a steady and regular number of worshippers at the services.

### **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)?**

It has to be realised that most of the congregation give so much of their time in the past to fundraising, it must also be realised that the congregation is ageing as in so many rural churches so to ask them to take on something is expecting a lot. Personally I would like us to be a bit involved with outside mission i.e. something to do with poverty, in this country and overseas, but again we are a very small village with a small congregation.

I have been elected as church warden for the forthcoming year which will be a challenge but hopefully rewarding and should fit in with my way of life (retired but a busy person).

I'm not currently in a position to take on anything entirely by myself but I'm more than happy to assist in any capacity to improve and support the church.

I am at the wrong end of my three score years and ten to be able to offer anything now in a physical capacity but to continue to support the Church the best I can. However, I do reserve the right, using my lifetime experience of the community, to make comment, both for and against when I feel decisions are not being taken correctly or when I do not believe an individual may not be acting in an appropriate manner to secure the cohesiveness of the Church as a whole.

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

This depends on what we want to achieve and whether we are looking at the question on a local or a Diocesan level. We should always work together and in doing so be prepared to tolerate each others faults. I have already said at Deanery Synod that even there we do little to make the group welcoming and I feel this is a fault of the church. I have attended many churches in my lifetime as I have lived in so many different places and as a new member have not been welcomed or made to feel a comradeship in many of them. This is not conducive to people wanting to attend church or help in projects which are church initiated. God said love one another but too often one another do little to show even basic friendship, 'the peace' in our church liturgy excepted.

By listening to the views of others and by keeping open communication lines. Focus our energies to achieve goals not destroying progress before it can be made.

A difficult question. We are quite a small parish and equally a small community. One needs to look at the church as a whole and open our eyes more to see the success of other churches. The help and experience of the vicar and the ministry team is vital and we **all** need to accept that as the way forward.

Changes in the Church are more likely to happen if they start at the bottom, at Parish level, rather than being imposed from the top. In fact changes which could improve the Church at grass roots level are unlikely to happen if we wait for an upper level which appears to be becoming more interested in its political opinion than in working to improve its own image in the community. In particular this applies to the leaders of different Christian religions who appear very unable to come together as one voice to improve the perception of the Christian faith. Whereas at grass roots level a lot is being done to work together for the good of the community. Hopefully this co-operation will move upwards through the various Churches.

The biggest challenge is to attract more people into the church. Communication is essential and an awareness of the church and what it offers to the wider community. This could be done perhaps by holding a coffee morning, or having a concert at St John's. It is possible to get help with funding for toilets etc. that would be needed for functions in St John's. The National Church Community Fund was mentioned for grants.

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

This is difficult to answer. Services must reach out to the general population and if services are talked about outside church this helps to spark an interest to encourage people to come to see for themselves. Things like this are easier in large towns than in small villages especially where the commuter population keep much to themselves. This seems to point to trying to break down barriers between people, to be open and not cliquey, to encourage people to feel that all are a contributing and part of a

community. This may not be reflected in increased congregations but could lead to more support of *church* led initiatives and show an impact.

Again an individual feeling. Simply when one comes away from any service anywhere and say 'That was a lovely service'. Measures quality and impact on the person which reflects in the quality of the church and ministry.

Not only by attendance numbers but by the number of very keen and enthusiastic people who happily contribute to the church in other ways. This might mean anything from helping to organise an event to just buying a raffle ticket. All of these people happily support the church despite much pressure on working families and those working shifts who might find it difficult to attend regular worship.

It is misleading to judge the state of the Church or of Christianity in general by looking at the numbers that attend Church on a regular basis. There are so many alternatives, especially for young families. Children are encouraged to take part in sport for good health reasons, most sports, particularly in rural areas, have Sunday Leagues.

It is best to judge the state of the Church by looking at the community it serves. Is that community a happy and vibrant place for people to live in? Is it a community that supports those less able and does it support charitable causes outside of its own area?

## **Bremhill: 'Let Us Talk'**

### **1. What is the personality and character of your local church?**

The church building is important architecturally because of its age and its Kemp windows. The parish is small – about 220 homes. There is no new development in the area. It is a wealthy area, many of the people attend the church on high days. Fund raising is always very successful. People are generous with their giving on the whole. The feel of the parish is traditional. A desire to keep to the 'hymns we know'. The retired non-stipendiary priest has lived in the parish for his whole life and is at the centre of the social scene. Very few young people attend the Sunday services and then only the Family Service sometimes. The population is mainly elderly or middle class young families. The regular and loyal congregation are adverse towards any change and there is a view that others 'are not interested in church' at the present time.

### **2. What are the priorities of your local church?**

To continue to pay its way. There is now a Standing Committee for the PCC which is working towards changes to the fabric of the church which will enable more functions to take place in the church itself and for the church to be able to offer the community 21<sup>st</sup> century comfort when attending. It is hoped that the changes will bring parishioners into greater contact with the church and that they may also come to be a regular part of the worshipping community in time. Changes include a children's area, removal of some pews, a small kitchen and toilet facilities. The heating and lighting will also be reviewed and a loop system and PA system installed. There is no water in the church at the present time and a long path to negotiate when taking water to the church for baptisms.

As St Martin's is an ancient building it is hoped that when faculty is applied for that there will be positive and constructive help given to achieve modernisation for the future membership of the church.

All of this will hopefully, raise the profile of the church in the community.

**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)?**

The immediate priority above is the current aim. No other changes are currently planned as all efforts will be needed to engage with the parishioners on this and win their support.

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

It would be helpful to have someone who is not necessarily from the DAC but could give general advice on examples of internal reordering that have had a major impact on the life of the church and that would welcome visitors. It would also be helpful to have 'an expert' who has seen many modernisations of churches and been through the process of change. Guidance on how to consult with the different stakeholders in the parish, and perhaps beyond would also be helpful from someone experienced in this matter.

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

Basically by how a community works together but also on how it looks beyond itself to those who are on the outside. How does it relate to non-church goers? Are its members well respected and valued in the community for their good works? Is the congregation growing? Does the church have an engaging and loving ethos that draws people in? Do people turn to church members when they have a need for help and support – for day to day help or/and prayer?

## **Derry Hill & Studley: 'Let Us Talk'**

**1. What is the personality and character of your local church?**

Christ Church is a Victorian building with a dated kitchen area and recently refurbished toilet facilities. It has a gallery that seats around 40 people.

The character and the personality of the church is changing. Beside the PCC there is a choir and Mothers' Union. Recently the Mothers' Union leadership changed and the group is raising its profile within the life of the church. The church community is vibrant and open to listening to ideas for change. Change is uncomfortable for the more elderly group which have been the backbone of the church for many years. However, they are willing to listen. The wider community is becoming more involved with church activities. Three LPAs – the first in Derry Hill were commissioned last November and are making a valuable contribution to the life of the church in the community. Many church members quietly support and help others too in the parish e.g. in the provision of a Luncheon Club for the infirm and elderly. The church is a happy one and provides a friendly welcome with refreshments served at All Age worship. Children of all ages are very welcome and the needs of its members are a priority. There is a real acknowledgement of the need for good communication to all parishioners and this has recently been met through the launch of a parish magazine that is distributed to all houses in the parish. The membership of the church is made up from locals but also those who live in Calne, Melksham and near Chippenham. Up to 50% of the congregation drive to the church from outside the parish. The Bowood estate is in the vicinity of the church. Music is an important element of worship.

The church members support a number of charities during the year through special collections during worship and through home collection boxes. Collection boxes for the

Leprosy Mission and Children's Society are brought to services. Christingle includes the collection of toys for children who would otherwise have nothing at Christmas time etc. Also collections for Doorway (local refuge), Christian Aid (door to door and service), and Traidcraft at services during the year.

## **2. What are the priorities of your local church?**

To develop the interior of the church to be more flexible. This involves the replacement of permanent choir stalls with a stackable option to make better use of the space for worship but also for harvest suppers, agape meals etc. Health and Safety is also a priority as part of the changes e.g. removal of a concrete plinth from underneath the font. Improving the PA system and moving the Children's Area to a larger location are also priorities. An equal priority is paying the parish share.

The laity are increasing their involvement in worship and in house groups eg during Lent and Advent. Groups are now formed to organise and lead the new informal service Praise@4 and a group has just been formed to organise and lead the Family Service. The priority is to use the church more for various styles of worship to keep the traditional worshippers involved but also to draw in young families of which there are many in the village. There is a primary school for 200+ children in Derry Hill that regularly uses the church.

As part of showing recognition for all that work, either on the maintenance of the church or in leading worship the PCC invited everyone involved to the APCM when there was a service of thanksgiving, gifts for those retiring, and welcome to new office holders as well as a presentation of the changes for the forthcoming year that were being suggested. It is important to the church for everyone to know that their contribution and 'voice' is valued. Wine and nibbles were served afterwards.

## **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)?**

The plans and consultation with the stakeholders are in progress for the changes to the worship area of the church. To be able to set up a Christian beginners' course – perhaps 'Start' or something similar; maybe Alpha.

To increase the confidence of church members and to encourage them to discern and use their skills for the good of the outside community.

To develop the Marriage Preparation with the Mothers' Union.

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

To have areas of expertise that can be tapped into easily e.g. someone who is an expert on refurbishment/reordering being available to discuss and advise on change in a particular circumstance. Advice perhaps on developing strategy within a parish/benefice/team.

A pool of 'good ideas' that have worked for parishes of a similar description.

Support/consultation in setting up a Friends of..... organisation.

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

By the numbers attending services and church events, whether they are going up or down. By the feedback from visitors to the church and the parishioners. Through the community spirit and the level of involvement of the church in community matters and how it is received. By the number of enquiries for occasional services and whether the people involved keep in contact. By the confidence of the laity in becoming more involved in leading the church. By increased membership of the various groups e.g. Bible Study groups, confirmation classes, Mothers' Union etc. By the 'atmosphere' when church members meet together.