

This is the All Saints, Swanage Response to the 'Let Us Talk' consultation.

I am attaching a document which you might find helpful. This is our Church 5 year Vision Strategy which we adopted in November 2011. Many of the replies to the 5 questions are dealt with in much more detail in this document. However I will cover the five questions as set out on the website.

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

- **A medium sized church** – at the end of 2011 we had connections with 231 people (208 adults and 23 children/young people) in 124 separate households. The average weekly attendance of 111 is drawn from 153 adults and 23 children (whom we could regard as the core members). We are about to update our church directory.
- **Above average age** – the average age in the UK is about 39 (2005 figure) – the average age in Swanage is 48 (see the Dorset Date Book 2010 page 89). But the average age of All Saints is 58.25 (it was 60.4 at the beginning of 2011 so we reduced by 2 years in one year!).
- **Evangelical** – in other words we believe that the basis of the Christian faith is a life-changing personal encounter with Jesus – and we have a desire to pass on this message to others
- **Biblical** – because we believe that the Bible is God's inspired word to us, it is the basis for all our teaching and the authoritative standard by which we decide all we do as a church.
- **Spirit filled** – we have a growing understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit in our lives as Jesus' way of empowering His Church for witness in the world.
- **Anglican and ecumenical** – many of our members have been 'CofE' all their lives. About the same number (including the vicar!) are from different church backgrounds (or none). All Saints is part of the Swanage Team of four churches and also part of the Purbeck Deanery consisting of over 20 different churches. Anglicanism is of course a very wide tradition and we seek to reflect this variety in all our different services without watering down to a 'lowest common denominator' approach. We also have very close links to other churches – ecumenical relationships are very good in Swanage and there is a wide acceptance that we need to work with the whole of the Swanage church family to bring the Kingdom of God in our town.
- **A healthy church** - we have done two church surveys with Natural Church Development since 2010 (see www.ncd-uk.com/NCD_UK_BROCHURE_v1.1_May_2012.pdf). This seeks to score the health of a church alongside 8 criteria. We scored particularly highly on 'loving relationships' and 'passionate spirituality' – All Saints people consistently show a high level of commitment to one another and to their Lord. We scored rather lower on 'gift based ministry' and 'need-orientated evangelism'. So many of us are very committed but if we are not careful our church might perhaps become a little inward looking – we all have lives outside of church but we need to be better at taking the Good News of Jesus Christ outside of the church building.

2. What are the priorities of your local church?

As a church we have agreed that everything we do should seek to advance one of the following objectives, and not damage any of the others. Our aim is that we should become

- **Larger** – we would grow numerically
- **Younger** – we would attract younger people
- **Deeper** – we would deepen our relationship with God
- **Stronger** – we would strengthen our relationships with each other
- **Wider** – we would spread the love of Jesus more widely

These aims have two implications

Firstly these aims are comparative – in other words they are ‘er’ words. That means that we don’t just want to be large but to become ***larger*** – not just to have a deep relationship with God but a ***deeper*** one. So we need to do something different to what we are doing now - or we will be no different. That means we need as a church to embrace a culture of change. That will be hard for some of us (including the vicar!). All the evidence of the last 50 years is that churches which refuse to allow God to change them do not stay the same – they decline. But churches which are willing to allow the Holy Spirit to change them grow.

Secondly everything we do needs to be aligned to those 5 key aims – to further at least one of them and not to damage any of the others. If what we plan to do doesn’t further one of those aims or damages one of the others then we don’t do it – it is as simple as that.

We have also been thinking of a way to sum up our key values to outsiders – a ‘*strapline*’ if you like. We believe that we can sum up our values in 4 words -

‘Loving – Learning – Serving – Together’

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)?

We are (we think) doing a lot. In October 2012 the whole church went through the SHAPE course (there is a useful introduction to the course from the Diocese of Chelmsford at <http://www.chelmsford.anglican.org/faith/finding-your-ministry>). As a result of that we have set up 9 Ministry Task Groups designed to involve every member of our Church. These groups cover

- *Buildings/Facilities*
- *Communications/Website/Publicity*
- *Evangelism/outreach/community involvement*
- *External Mission*
- *Hospitality/Social*
- *Pastoral*
- *Prayer/prayer ministry/Prophetic/Healing*
- *Worship and Teaching*
- *Youth/children*

We hope to push forward changes in every aspect of our church's ministry having just appointed Team leaders of the different teams to drive forward development.

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

This is a difficult question to answer in the abstract. Of course there are ways we can work together better but in a place like Swanage the opportunities of working together are within the team and ecumenical. If you wanted us to do so we could tell you in more detail about the ways we work within the team and also across the wider church family in Swanage.

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

This is not a difficult question to answer. There are some clear ways of establishing this.

Each church needs to set up some SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-related). Then on an annual basis the key leader (team vicar or rector) needs to report to his bishop/archdeacon as to how those objectives are being achieved and what is the trend compared to earlier years. This would include asking the following questions:

- 5.1 How many people have joined the church in the previous year?
- 5.2 How many people have left in the previous year and why?
- 5.3 Is the age of the church increasing or decreasing?
- 5.4 Are more or less people worshipping than in the previous year (you need really accurate records to do this).
- 5.5 How many people have come to a living faith in Christ in the previous year?
- 5.6 How many people have been baptised as adults and/or confirmed in the previous year?
- 5.7 In what specific ways has the church decided to fulfil its mission in the world and is it achieving this?
- 5.8 Is the church solvent - does it have enough money to do what it wants? Is the giving rising or falling?
- 5.9 Is it giving away - specifically is it tithing its income to mission?