

Dear Bishop,

The parish of Wareham comprises five Anglican churches so it is not surprising that there was some range of different views expressed in the replies to your five questions.

However it was almost unanimous that we thought of ourselves as hospitable and friendly - that is, to outsiders if not always to each other. This was because we saw that there were divisions among us in our different approaches to churchmanship and we recognised the need for greater unity. Perhaps we should have more united services to demonstrate a greater united front in our locality. These then were the aspects given the highest rating in our response – our friendliness and our need for unity.

Our PCC met to consider the matters you raise and we discussed them both in a plenary meeting and in relation to each individual church.

While the main parish church of Lady St Mary saw its personality as mainly friendly and welcoming, St Martin's at Sandford regarded its hospitality as directed to each other in mutual help. Young and old are to witness to God. St Martin's on the Walls put first their mature support and welcome especially to those seeking a more traditional form of service, while St Nicholas at Arne with its diverse congregation and tiny local residency regarded itself as sociable and welcoming to those outside its own immediate orbit.

The priorities of these churches are very much to do with being an integrated part of the local community. This includes outreach in many different forms to local schools and shops, and running various sales opportunities for coffee and refreshments on a Saturday morning. The Wareham Parish Churches are also fully supportive of the charity set up by members of the church to reach out to young people in the new endeavour called 'Not just Sundaes' in the former Holy Trinity building in Wareham, which will be in use every day of the week. There is also much to be done among the very many families bringing children to baptism. The Lady St Mary church can be very nearly full on these occasions with families that may not be seen again. Why is this? What should we be doing to encourage a return visit when there is no 'special occasion' to celebrate. The wider question is about connecting with everyone outside the church.

What would we like to take on in the coming year? We saw the need for developing a personal approach to mission among the reality of extending church influence throughout the area. The realities of this include prayer and e-mail support in ways that are yet to be explored. We have just established a parish Mission Committee that will work to encourage our congregations to think more about mission of all kinds – local and domestic as well as international and overseas. We also thought that more teaching on the role of the Holy Spirit would deepen our commitment - it could be seen as somewhat superficial at present. We certainly see a need to be stronger and better equipped to represent Jesus in public. A real sense of Vision would help - and for this, and that greater sense of unity, we look forward to our parish weekend, in Sidmouth this November.

How can we work together to achieve more? We know that helping our five churches to work together is not easy – in some ways it is simpler to encourage mutual help across the various churches present in Wareham. We have regular meetings with the other denominations in the town, but we do need to pray for one another and offer practical help such as with the Holy Trinity project. Such support is forthcoming but it is still slow and we know that much more could be done.

And how do we measure the quality and impact of what we are doing? In discussing this we thought that we were not the best people to answer the question, but that this should come from the community itself. We therefore propose to put the question in the next issue of our community magazine which has a wide distribution in the area. We will also ask what the local people think should be the priorities of the church here. We believe that useful ideas could emerge from such an approach.

So yes, there is a recognition of getting out of our 'comfort zones', to learn more and grow, as one church instead of five, in order to make progress with the Commission which Jesus has given us.

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Parish of Wareham.