

WHITTON BENEFICE

RESPONSE TO THE BISHOP'S 'LET US TALK' PRESENTATION – Jan 2013

Personality and Character

Whitton is a rural benefice of five parishes and six churches in the north of the Diocese. Different liturgical traditions reflect different parochial identities; however common bonds are growing as we increase our work together as a Team. There are five PCCs and a Team Council, which is beginning to take an active role in the development of mission. We are fortunate in having a Rector, part-time Vicar, part-time NSM Curate, three retired clergy and two LLMs, but are well aware that this sized team of clergy will not last for ever!

In each village the church is a focus for funerals, weddings and baptisms. It also has a public face in annual fetes and sales. The buildings are frequently used for concerts and other village events. Neighbourly visiting is part of rural life and church members are involved in almost all aspects of village affairs, but usually without the label of being 'church'.

Two major current concerns for all the parishes are the finding of the Diocesan share and the expense of maintaining and improving the church buildings. As the number of active members of the churches is not great (and increasingly elderly), these two concerns can become time and energy consuming, distracting from the development of ministry and mission.

Priorities

During 2012 the Team and each PCC undertook an exercise to identify priorities. In summary:

1. *'Educating children and young people in the Christian faith'* Linking this with *'Helping people on their spiritual journey'* gives a strong mandate for looking at how we can best enable discipleship and nurture among young people and adults.
- 2a *'Providing baptisms, weddings and funerals for the community'* has significance for pastoral care, mission and ministry in the community.
- 2b *'Providing inspiring worship'* has implications for building up our existing congregations, as well as bringing others to share in worship.
3. Two other priorities important for individual PCCs, but not so widely shared, were *'Maintaining the church for the next generation'* and *'Being involved in community'*.

Action in 2013

The Team Council is to progress these priorities. Work is already underway in the areas of ministry to children and their families, and young people. A more structured approach to engaging lay people in pastoral matters is being developed. A new Community Contact scheme will be assessed.

The parishes are progressively working more together; for instance one PCC has helped another financially, and Treasurers have met to discuss common problems.

Measurements

A survey in 2010 in one village, looking at the part the church plays in village life, showed how extremely difficult it is to make any measurement of the impact of church life, although the survey does provide one template for how this might be done. However, with increased outreach over the past few years, some 85 families with young children had active contact with that church in 2012 – but hardly ever at Sunday services!