

## Salisbury Diocesan Synod – February 2019

It has been my privilege to lead on the Ministry for Mission [M4M] initiative across the Diocese for the last six or seven years. We seek to encourage a true Mixed Economy in each parish, as we grow new worshipping communities.

Let's start with the traditional, inherited church. Good growth in a traditional congregation comes through:

- Good pastoral care – especially through the pastoral Services
- Good Liturgy – whether BCP or CW – with a good sermon – relevant and engaging.
- Outward focus onto the needs of the community and social action.

But, with this recipe, we will always attract the people like ourselves – Sunday focussed, Eucharistic or Evensong enthusiasts, our demographics, ethnicity etc. Who is missing? If we want to attract people other than like ourselves – we need to do something, anything, different – the Mixed Economy.

In **2016** a review was undertaken by Ministry 4 Mission of '**New Worshipping Communities**' (**NWC's**) in the Diocese. The rationale for these communities were that they were 'new', in that they were gatherings of people who would not traditionally attend church but wanted the opportunity to explore about issues of faith. These gatherings range through a variety of ages, young, old and often multi-generationally based, and in a variety of settings from village halls to pubs and community venues. To consider a gathering to be a 'Worshipping Community' they must have an element of prayer or praise, reflection or teaching as part of the gathering. This will be undertaken in a culturally appropriate way for the people groups that they gather together.

In **2016, 91** new worshipping communities were identified and the breakdown was as follows:

- 53% met on a weekday, 8% met on a Saturday and 55% met on a Sunday at a wide variety of times.
- 48% were growing, 46% were stable and 6% were declining.
- 73% were multi-generational, 70% were based around hospitality and the average number of people attending was 38 at each initiative.
- 29% were led by clergy, 27% were led by lay people and 44% had shared clergy and lay leadership.
- All but two New Worshipping Communities had links with a traditional sending parish church.

In **2018** we have undertaken a similar review using the same criteria with clergy being asked to give current details of NWC's in their benefices. To ensure parity, the same format was used.

The encouraging part of the follow up was that **89** of NWCs have survived for 2 more years and indeed are growing, as they consolidate their work. Interestingly more than **63** churches sent in nil or no returns and there were no details of NWC activities on their websites. Again the main trends are as follows:

**Messy Church.** This is one of the most successful means of outreach to families as the national support is very comprehensive and offers material and advice, as do the diocesan HUBS which are in 3 areas across the diocese.

Currently there are **24 active Messy Churches** in the diocese. These are predominantly run by lay people and are challenging on those who run them, as most meet monthly and require significant resourcing. As a consequence, two have closed, however two new ones have started over the last 2 years. Funding is an issue as not all local churches fund them and there is an expectation that they 'stand-alone'. A common concern has been raised about whether the numbers are/should be included in annual returns.

- Gatherings that incorporate **food and worship** have been successful in reaching communities and are equally popular in rural and more built up areas, as a means of engaging with the local community. There are **2 Tea Time Churches** and **8 Café Churches**. There are **13 Breakfast Churches** active in the diocese but we believe there are more that have not been recorded in this research. The Breakfast **HUB** is proving very popular particularly for those considering starting Breakfast Church in their area, as they can turn to those attending for help and support.
- **New Housing** New Housing areas have given significant opportunities for mission and the creating of NMC's. When the diocese supports them by appointing clergy and lay people as pioneers, then new initiatives have grown. Kingfisher Church is a good example of this longer term, as is the work in Gillingham, Melksham, Old Sarum, Poole, Warminster and others. Housing such as at St Peters Place in Salisbury is establishing a Community Hub, in the new Church Academy.
- **Reflective worship** Exploration into new forms of worship have also drawn people together creating new styles of worship using reflection and prayer 'space'. Examples such as the **School Eucharistic Community at Woodford Valley Academy, Soul Space**, and **Community of the Annunciation**, alongside **Still Waters, Revive** and **Celtic Worship** all which have worship and reflection as the focus of the gathering.

**Rural NWCs.** We are looking at areas of need in rural areas and the new Rural Field Officers are going to be crucial in developing new initiatives. M4M intends to create courses in 2019 which will help churches both rural and town based to grow New Worshipping Communities and equip both clergy and lay people with tools to assist in this. The HUBS continue to be an asset and will be supported by the M4M Resource Officer.

One of our greatest opportunities is the fantastic church schools across the Diocese. I've always thought of them not as Church Schools, but as School Churches – each with a distinctive congregations of students, teachers, governors and parents. Why do congregations in a vacancy ask for someone who will bring children into church, when children ought to have an experience of church five days a week? Perhaps if we were to join the children in school, they might teach us a thing or two about church?

Alan Jeans