

Refreshing the Vision feedback – a snapshot

June 2023

Bishop Michael invited feedback on the four areas he had identified that might help us to live out our vision of responding to God's generous love for us by living and telling the story of Jesus.

Below is a snapshot of the responses we received.

Stake 1 – Valuing and cherishing the people we already have

Valuing and cherishing the people we already have, to be light and salt in our communities

Key themes that emerged:

- While churches reported valuing who they have, they don't always feel valued themselves.
- We need to truly honour people's individual gifts and not just use them to fill gaps
- We do have churches that are experiencing growth, supporting one another, and reaching out to their communities in a host of ways.

This is a refreshing aim as have often felt a huge pressure to bring new people in. Obviously, we want to grow our churches but starting with valuing what we already have feels like the right place to start.

We are in [vacancy] at the moment and facing challenges around deanery restructuring. Everyone is supporting each other and working together to reduce the uncertainty as much as possible.

I believe our village church is good at valuing everyone. All are made to feel welcome and the church does a lot to engage with the whole village.

Stake 2 – Developing new Christian worshipping communities

When we share our faith and worship together in new and different ways, this often connects with people who wouldn't engage with our traditional offering. Putting in place something different offers us the scope to grow and become younger and more diverse

Key reflections that emerged:

- There was mention of innovation with forms of worship and leadership, many of these focusing on children, young people and families. There was less mention in the feedback of new forms of Christian worshipping community, new ways of living out discipleship, and everyday faith.
- It is hard to do [traditional worship and new forms] with limited resources and especially during extended vacancies.
- How do we create new communities in new areas, such as new housing or an FE college? In creating new Christian worshipping communities, how do we balance existing and new, permission and accountability?

There is a variety of worship in our benefice: a new Praise Service, lay led and well attended, including by some who do not come to church. A Cafe Church which worked really well for all ages but didn't survive Covid. Our benefice is likely to grow in size, so providing sufficient and varied worship is going to be a challenge. We have two study, prayer groups, one of which is rapidly growing and includes 3 young adults.

[In our context we now have] more sharing of our faith outside the church, sharing meals and chatting the gospel. It is a lifestyle not the church building, leading to a growing and thriving church community.

We are gospel focused with our ministry and mission being inclusive and collaborative. The Eucharist is at the heart of this but it is not the only way that we worship God and are fed and nurtured. This style attracts a variety of people including people who worship more visually as well as through words, some whose lives are chaotic and/or unpredictable, and some who come from other countries or denominations.

Stake 3 – Deepening and growing faith

How can we offer people pathways to go more than toe deep in their faith: so that they can go ankle deep, knee deep or fully immerse themselves?

Key themes that emerged:

- Small/home/study groups appear to be key in deepening faith and discipleship of both adults and young people. Smaller groups can also be places to welcome newcomers. There were some requests to equip more leaders, signpost to resources, and to offer networks.
- Feedback suggests that people are growing in faith and want to reach their local communities but lack confidence in sharing faith with others.
- There is a desire for more open and honest discussions about God and the world in safe and inclusive ways, and to disagree well.
- There is a longing to better connect churches with children/young people and schools, and for younger generations to help lead the way.

We have study/prayer groups which are significant for some people in their journey of faith. We have a few people who are new to faith or exploring faith, which is exciting.

[We are] looking outward into our communities within a missional and social justice framework that helps us grow in faith in partnership and in numbers.

[We want] increased inclusivity, with more members of the wider community feeling that there is a good reason for them to be involved with their local church. A church confident in sharing its faith as it engages with wider issues, being able to question, discuss, and disagree well. Allowing the younger generation scope to change us so we can be a Christian community for people of all ages.

[We want] schools and churches working in partnership in a more fundamental way, having a shared Christian vision, that is then delivered together.

[We are] growing through Bible study, links with Movement, summer camps, youth church led by young people and the team, ... and an increase in discipleship where young people are openly talking and sharing the gospel.

Stake 4 – Sharing in ministry and leadership

Sharing in ministry and models of leadership together – lay and ordained, across all ages, using the gifts, skills and passions of all so that no one person is overburdened or left out.

Key messages:

- Finding people with gifts is possible but what is needed are clear diocesan permissions to appropriately authorise them.
- Others spoke about a continuing expectation from some people for the vicar to do it all; that existing laity are already overburdened and not all want the responsibility of ministry or leadership.
- The dependence on retired clergy was remarked upon.
- It is hard to step back from leadership with no-one to replace you, so people get trapped in roles.
- The admin burden is huge.
- The challenge is both encouraging lay people to develop and use gifts and helping clergy to let go.

Let's turn it all on its head – the ministry of the church is carried out by its, essentially lay, membership. The role of the clergy is to enable this. To quote Stephen Cottrell, we need to move on from the heresy of the 'solo-hero' model of ministry.

Success could be more involvement for those who are not as yet contributing but would like to if asked.

[Success might look like] 'a local person in each village who is identified and authorised as the representative person, with authority, for that church in each village so that the wider community always has someone local they can identify with and contact.'

Thank you

It has been immensely helpful to hear a range of views, suggestions and stories from across our diocese. Overall, the responses have affirmed that the four key areas have broad acceptance. If you have any further thoughts you would like to share, or any questions, please email livingandtelling@bathwells.anglican.org. This will help develop our diocesan vision to live and tell the story of Jesus together.